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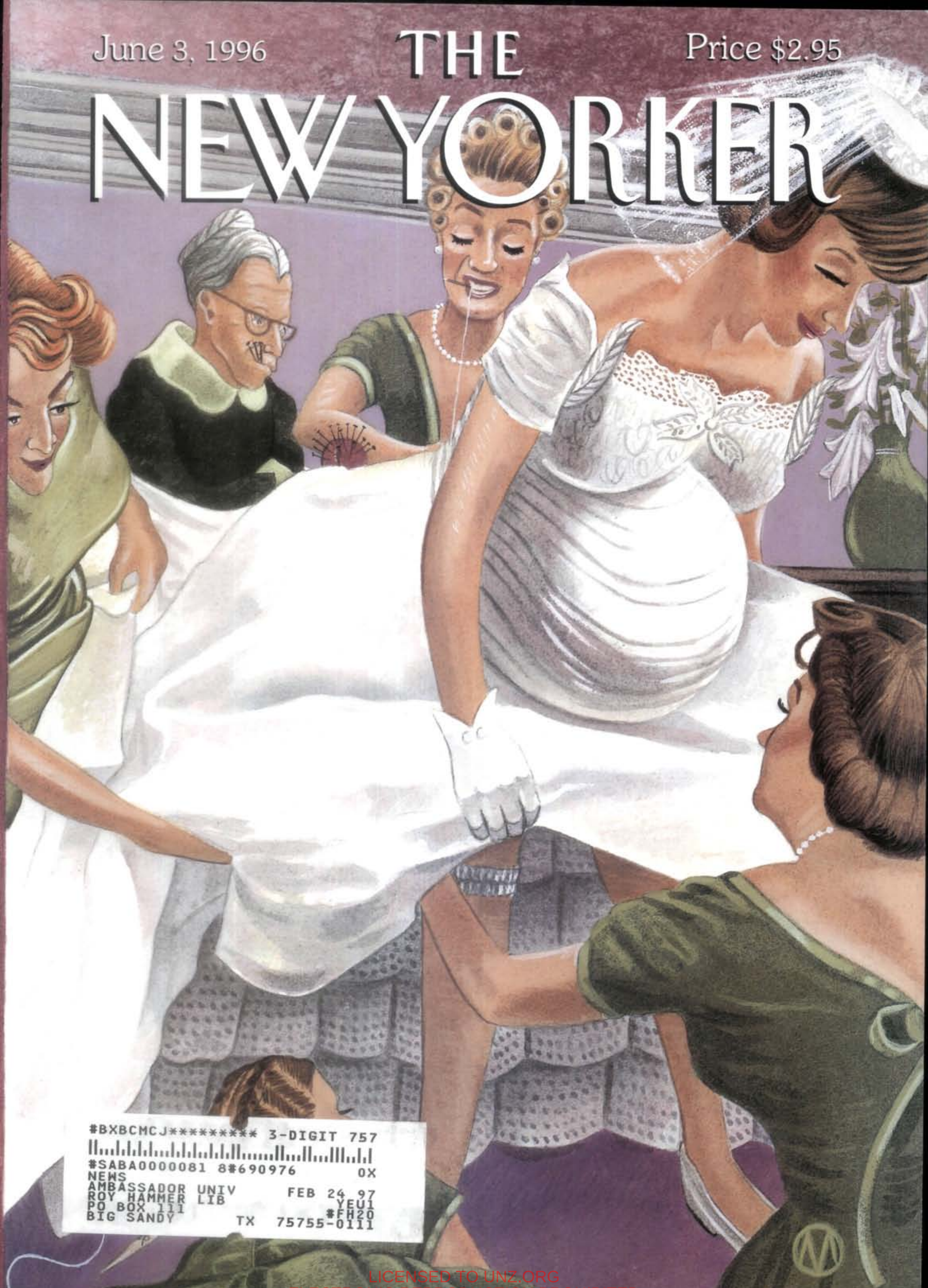

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THE NEW YORKER

JUNE 3, 1996

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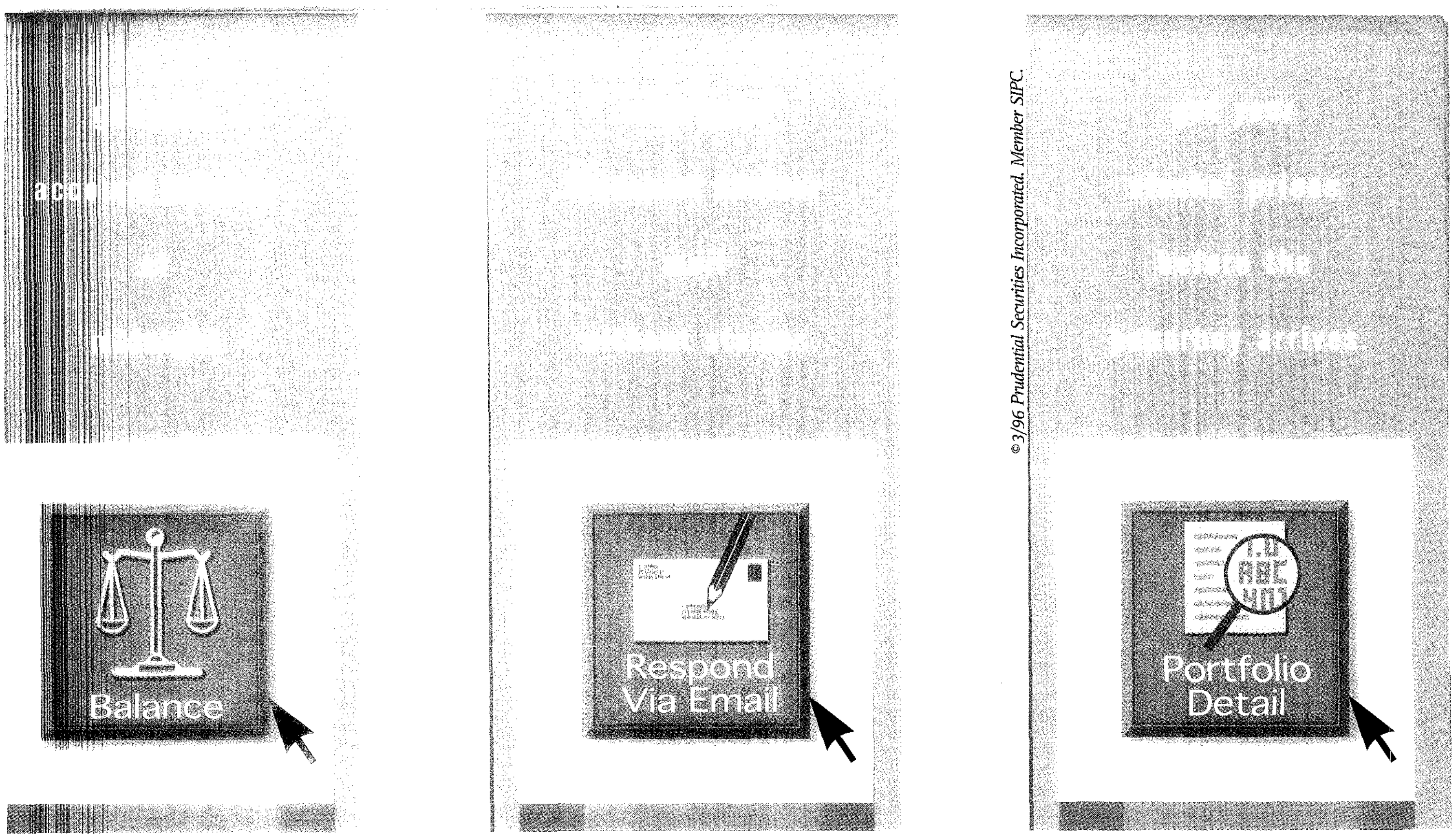

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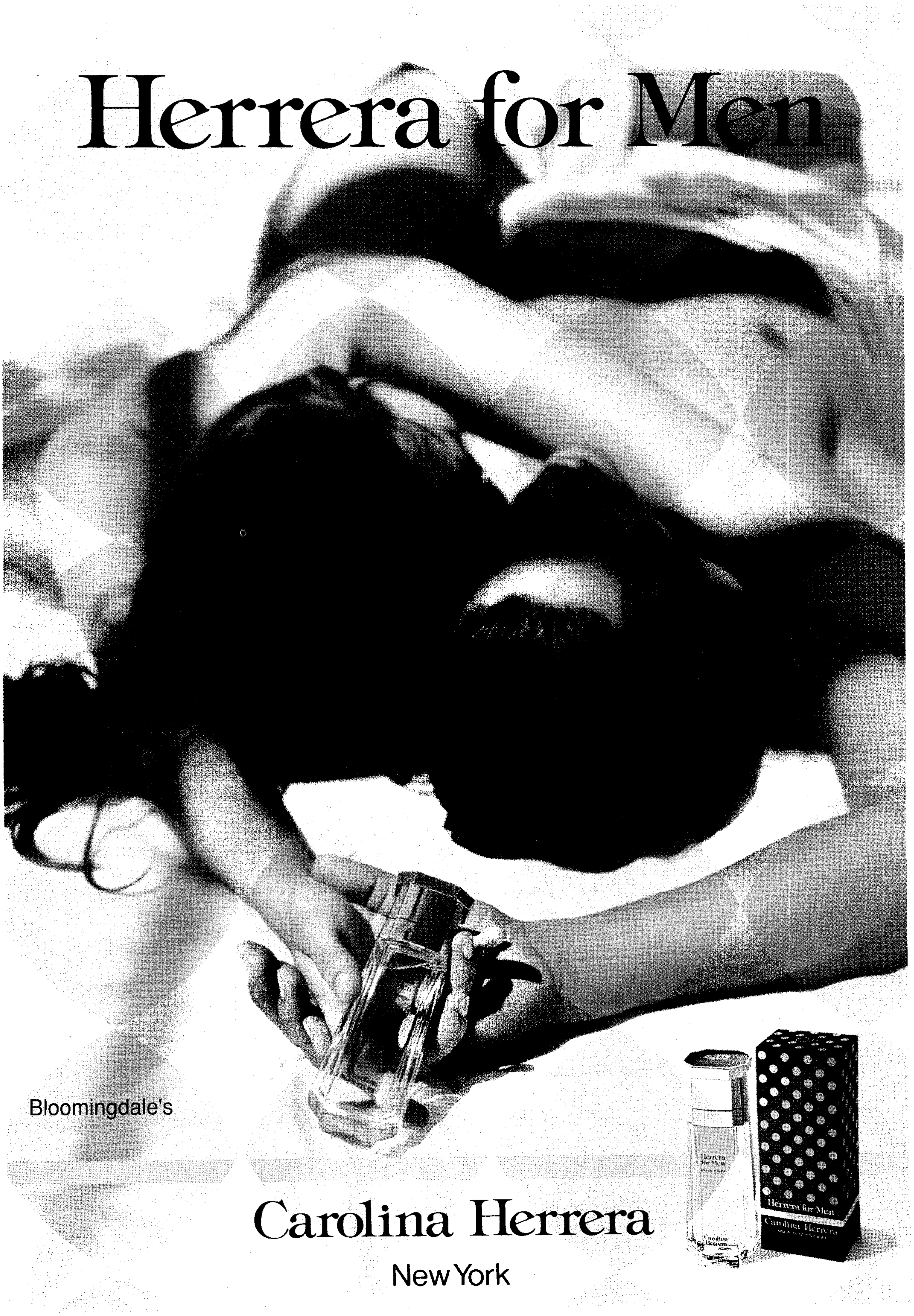
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COMMENT

CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

A gathering heralds a shift toward a new paradigm.

MOST Americans were taken by surprise when last October's Million Man March produced such an enormous turnout that it very nearly lived up to its ambitious name. A similar astonishment may be in the offing for Saturday, June 1st, when another vast assemblage—this time, of men, women, and children, black, white, and brown, from all fifty states; grandparents and teen-agers; traditional families and single parents wheeling kids in strollers; educators and students; and delegations from religious, cultural, business, and community organizations of every sort—will gather at the Lincoln Memorial in order to do what the organizers of the day's demonstration are calling it and calling for: Stand for Children.

Foremost among those organizers is Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, who, having spent the last five months crisscrossing the country, has succeeded in enlisting the support of some thirty-five hundred organizations. It's an impressive roster: from Action for Alaska's Children to the Zeta Phi Beta sorority; from the Catholic Family Service and the Police Athletic League to N.O.W. and the Council of Presidents of Women's National Organizations; from behemoths like the A.F.L.-C.I.O., the American Association of Retired Persons, and the Girl Scouts to local outfits like P.T.A.s and day-care associations (and no fewer than eighty branches of the Junior League).

Just as the Million Man March, whatever one's view of its leadership may be, undeniably revealed some previously hidden features of black America—most notably, a powerful drive for solidarity and self-respect among African-American men—the Stand for Children rally is likely to bring out some new thinking that has been quietly bubbling under the surface of the various and too often fragmented movements for American social renewal.

Stand for Children is a nonpartisan event, and no politicians have been invited to speak. But the sense of urgency behind it clearly has its roots in the attack on social programs mounted by conservative Republicans in Congress, who, with varying degrees of success, have demanded budget cuts in Head Start, school lunches, food stamps, child-nutrition and immunization programs, aid to education, student loans, the Medicare and Medicaid programs,

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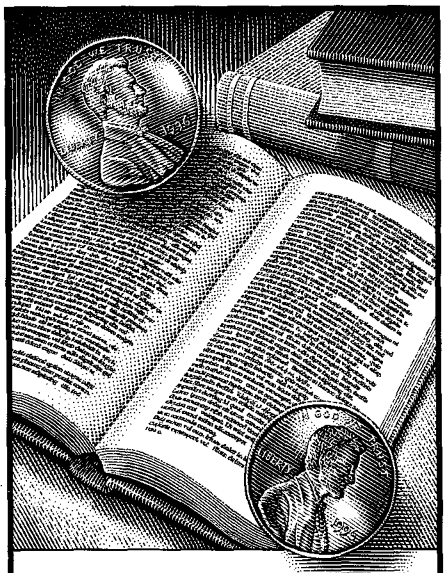

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and Aid to Families with Dependent Children—all to achieve not only deficit reduction but also large tax reductions skewed to the wealthiest among us. And this assault has come on top of fifteen years of social retreat and mindless celebration of market values over the values of community and, yes, family.

The new moves toward selective austerity have set off alarms within—and beyond—the scattered movements for social fairness. Among many in the women's movement, for example, the Gingrichian assault has fed a growing sense that the time is ripe to go beyond the "gender issues" that lately have been the movement's prime concerns—abortion, date rape, sexual harassment, pornography, and the like—to such larger matters as economic distress and social disintegration.

By joining Stand for Children, feminists are not, of course, proposing to give up the gains they have made. They will not give up affirmative action, which has opened so many jobs to women and minorities, without a fight, but neither will they just stare up at the glass ceiling while the foundations crumble. They will not submit silently to sexual harassment, but they will recognize that it is often a symptom of economic disequilibrium and of growing anxiety and insecurity among men.

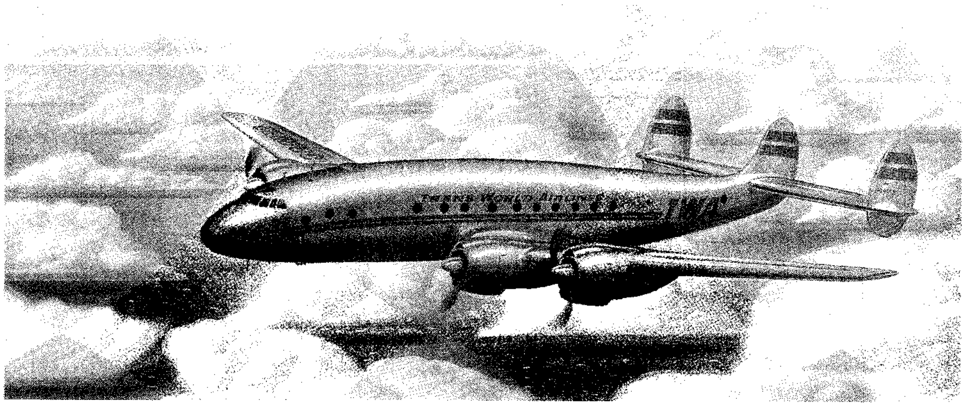
And, of course, women will fight any attempt to weaken what has been decided by Congress and courts and ratified again and again in polls—a woman's right to choose whether and when to bear a child. But, increasingly, women are realizing that they cannot afford an exclusive fixation on even so fundamental an issue as abortion rights at a time of wider threats to their well-being. As a number of recent polls have made clear, the most urgent concerns of women today are not gender issues but jobs and families.

The old paradigm of "identity politics"—a rights-based focus on narrowly defined grievances and goals—has increasingly shown its limitations. A future of separate and warring races, genders, and generations is in no one's interest. In seminars and schools, in community centers and union halls, in churches and the offices of public-spirited businesses, a new paradigm has been quietly taking shape. Perhaps its strongest unifying theme is a concern for children, who represent not only the greatest vulnerabilities of our institutions but also the future of those institutions. For many people, Stand for Children will mark the public début of this new paradigm.

Every child is different, but children are not rugged individualists. If children are to have a chance at a decent upbringing, a whole set of broader concerns must be entered on the national agenda. The list begins with confronting the politics of hate, the momentum of extreme income inequality, and the concentration of wealth in the top one-half of one per cent. And it includes alternatives to downsizing, among them job sharing and a shorter work-week, to meet the needs of parents of both sexes in the child-rearing years, people who combine school and work throughout life, and older people who want to keep working; and, given the reality that most mothers at every level of society now work, a national commitment to professional child care, such as exists in France and Germany.

The array of volunteer organizations that will assemble with the movements for equality on June 1st may not have the political clout to overcome the threat to the safety net for children. Nor does this "third sector" have the economic wherewithal to take up the slack if Congress succeeds in demolishing the public sector and corporations shirk their share of responsibility for the common good. But the power of these great national organizations of community volunteers in conjunction with the women's movement and the other forces for equality, in defense of children: this is a new kind of power. With luck, that power can unite America in a renewed spirit of community—one that does not deny our diverse, separate, and sometimes conflicting interests but seeks to subsume them, and even advance them, in a larger commitment to the future. —BETTY FRIEDAN

Joseph Mitchell, the author of "McSorley's Wonderful Saloon" and "Up in the Old Hotel" and a staff writer at this magazine since 1938, died on May 24th at the age of eighty-seven. An appreciation of his life and work will appear in next week's issue of *The New Yorker.*



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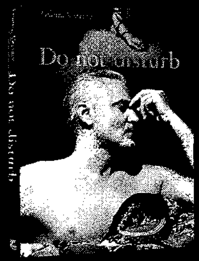

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JUDGING A NATION

Shortly after the Second World War, I lived in Germany for three years. One reason I went there was to gain some sense of what kind of people had let—or helped—one of history's greatest atrocities happen. In "Blaming the Germans," a review of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners" (A Critic at Large, April 22nd), Clive James provides a needed perspective on Goldhagen's verdict of collective guilt. Goldhagen estimates that about a hundred thousand Germans did the actual killing, at a time when Germany's population was about a quarter of what America's is today. What would happen if conditions comparable to Germany's in 1933 produced an extremist American government able to subvert constitutional safeguards, gain unlimited coercive power, and undertake to eliminate an entire group of citizens? Could such a regime recruit four hundred thousand willing killers? Only a very sanguine view of American society could support a confident "No." And if this did happen here, would many of us be able to match the courage of the resisters? I cannot confidently say that I could.

Stuart E. Colie
Ocean Springs, Miss.

Mr. James mentions Hitler's use of bribery, propaganda, social pressure, and violence to persuade the Germans to follow him. What I remember most from my childhood in Nazi Germany is how Hitler cleverly seduced the German people by giving them work and bread and a renewed belief in themselves, and also by giving them a common culture, a place where they belonged—something every person dreams of. My parents took me to see Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will," and it overwhelmed me and made me want to march with those people. If it had not been for my father's explanation of the corruption of the system, I, too, would have belonged and believed wholeheartedly.

Ingrid Wild Kleckner
Riverside, R.I.

Mr. Goldhagen defines all those who did not suffer persecution as persecutors; he has no appreciation of differences in people's activities, of distinctions between thoughts and actions, or of the historical conditions in which the Germans lived. Is the German who repaired the brakes on a train to Auschwitz, for example, a criminal against humanity? We are now fifty years from the Holocaust, and our sense of history is growing less subtle and more visceral. The understandable horror we feel in reaction to the Holocaust should not lead us to repeat the Nazis' mistakes: labelling groups as demonic, extinguishing intelligent analysis, and creating a climate in which dissenting voices are stifled.

Carole Straw
Associate Professor of History
Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Mass.

My confirmation suit was bought at a Jewish store in a small town named Fröndenberg, in Germany, in the spring of 1938. I was an "ordinary German" and a member of the Hitler Youth. That same year, after the Kristallnacht, a fifteen-year-old friend said to me, "Yes, our Jews are all right, but who knows what the ordinary Jew or his children are capable of?" Mr. Goldhagen's statements about "ordinary Germans" seem to echo my friend's—if you replace "Jew" with "German."

Hellmuth Fleige
Carlsbad, Calif.

I lived in Lodz, Poland, during the Nazi occupation, and I had ample opportunity to witness the behavior of "ordinary Germans." Most of my family perished. Frightening and humiliating performances were forced on Jews in the streets, and the public lined up to jeer at us. Nothing that was done to us was hidden from the German public. Yet we never knew where we would be taken, the reasons we might be arrested or punished or killed, or what would happen to any of us next. Many "ordinary Germans" did not have the opportunity to engage in the well-known crimes of the S.S. and the Gestapo, but the slave-labor camp I was sent to was managed by "ordinary Germans," who demonstrated the same capacity for cruelty as their compatriots.

LEO MAYERS
Otis, Mass.

Mr. James disputes the case made by Mr. Goldhagen that all Germans must share responsibility for the Holocaust. But to end his piece James writes of a Berlin synagogue "whose golden dome is a landmark for the district," and he notes that "two armed guards stand at the door, but this time in its defense." Just wondering: If "eliminationist anti-Semitism" is not now—and never has been—an essential part of the German national character, whom are those guards guarding the synagogue against?

DAVID FRIEDMAN
New York City

There is no consolation to be drawn from this debate. Mr. Goldhagen's general thesis may turn out to be mistaken, but the facts of what occurred will stay the same: Hitler spent twelve years promising the German people that if he came to power he would eliminate the Jews; in 1933 he got in, and he spent the next twelve years living up to his promise. No Germans ever stopped him; few even tried. And, no matter how you look at it, the Germans are responsible for that.

HERB MERITT
New Providence, N.J.

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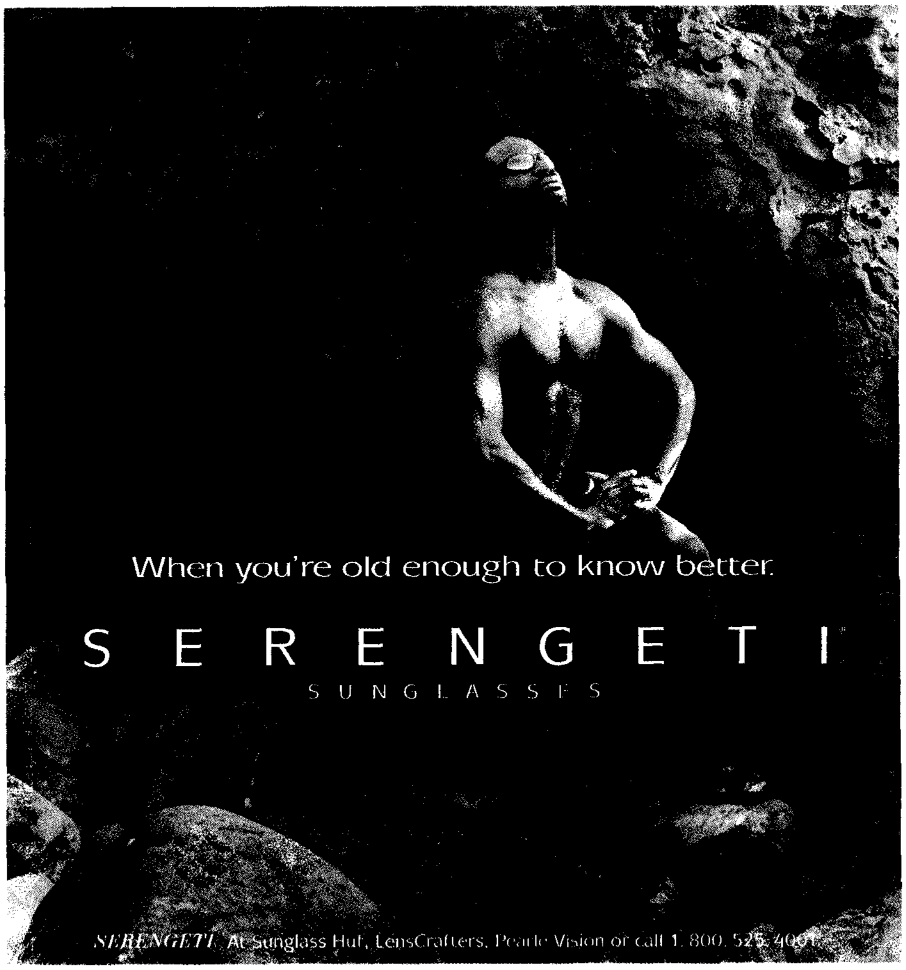
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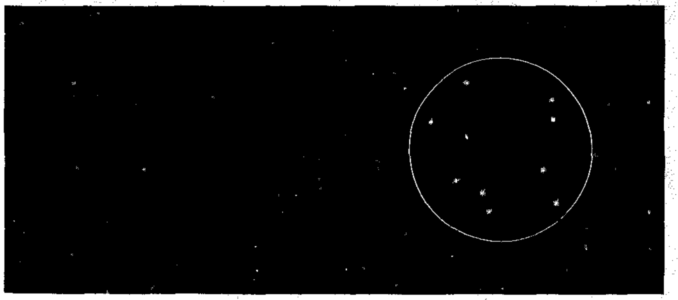

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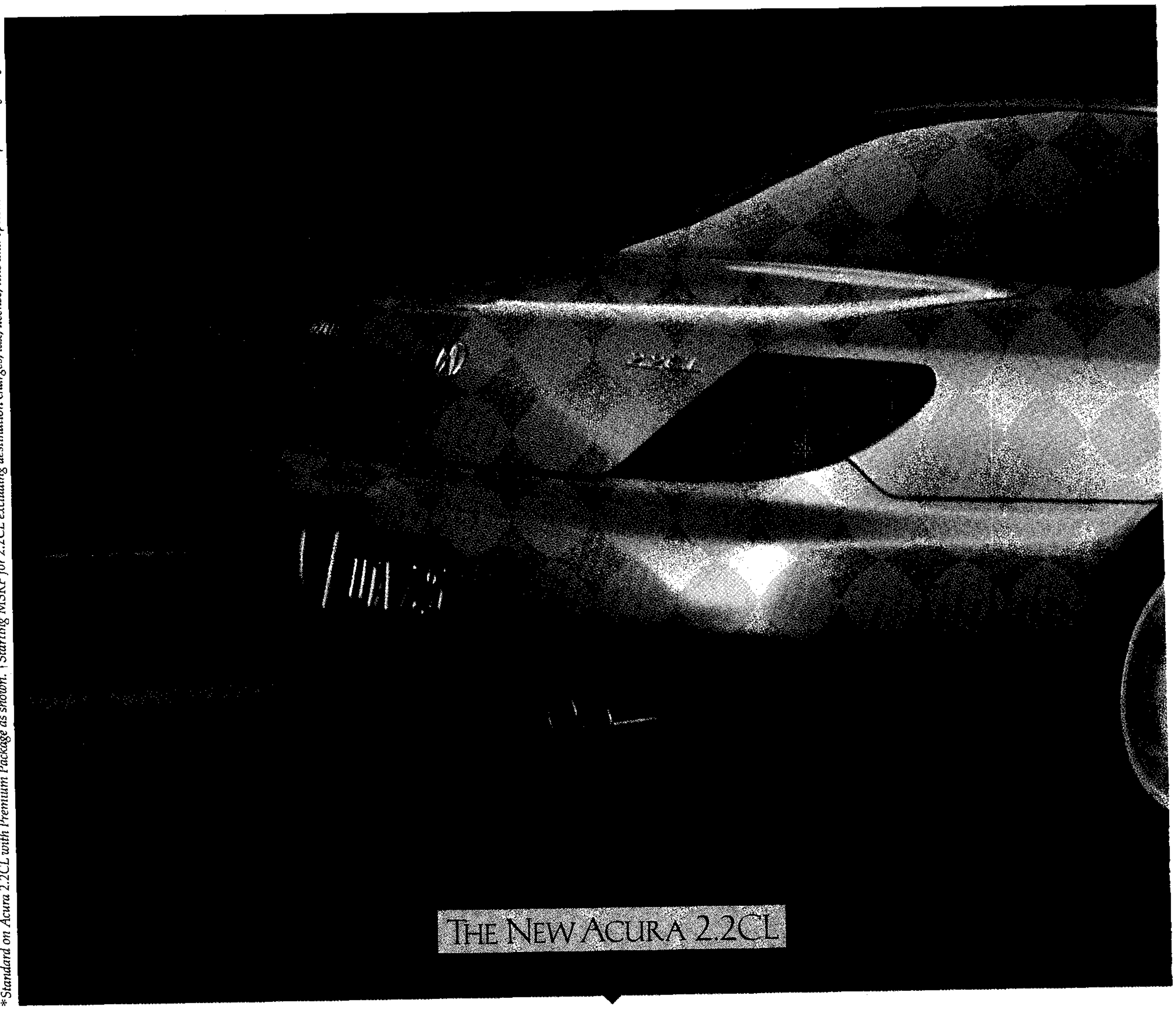

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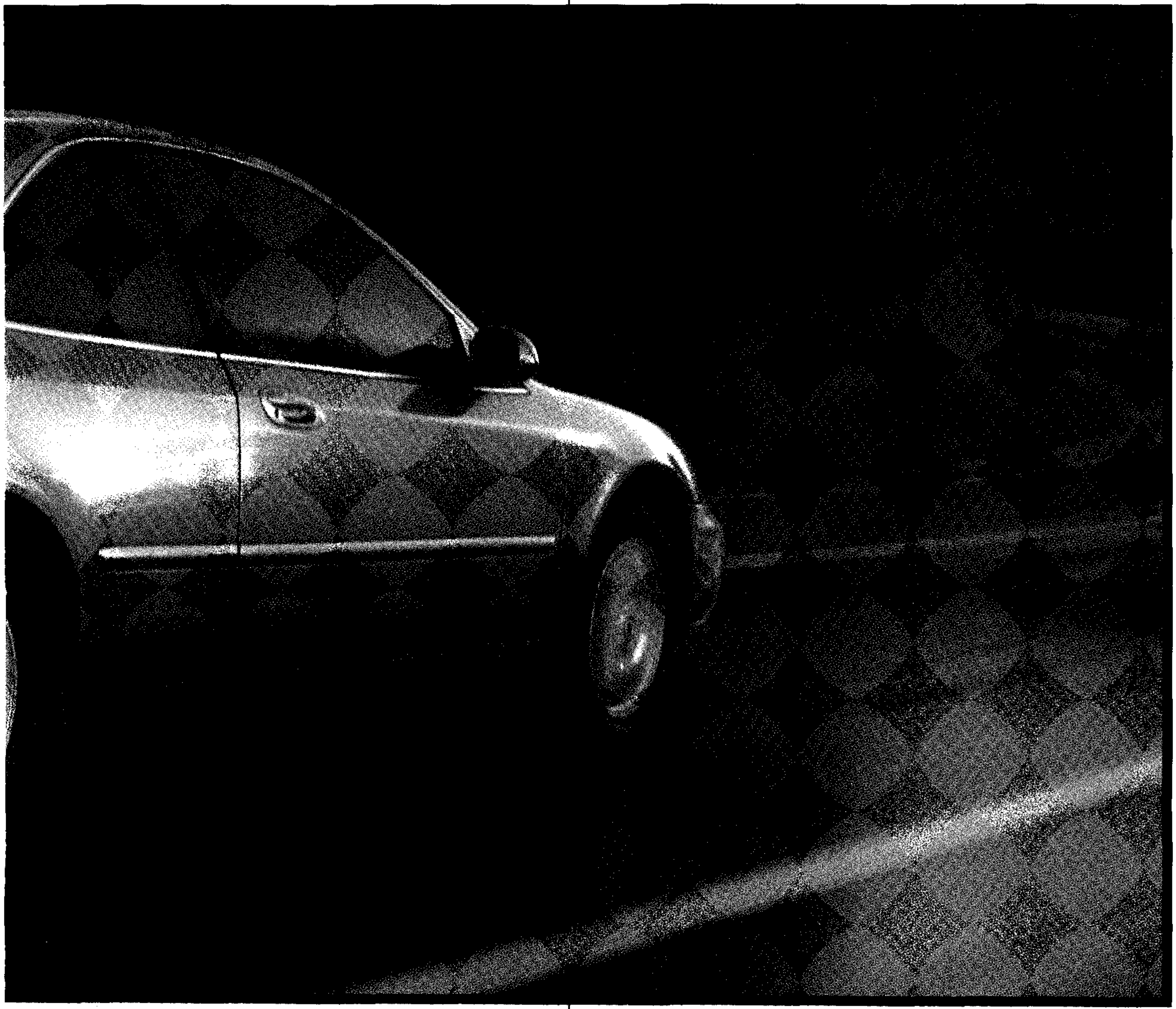

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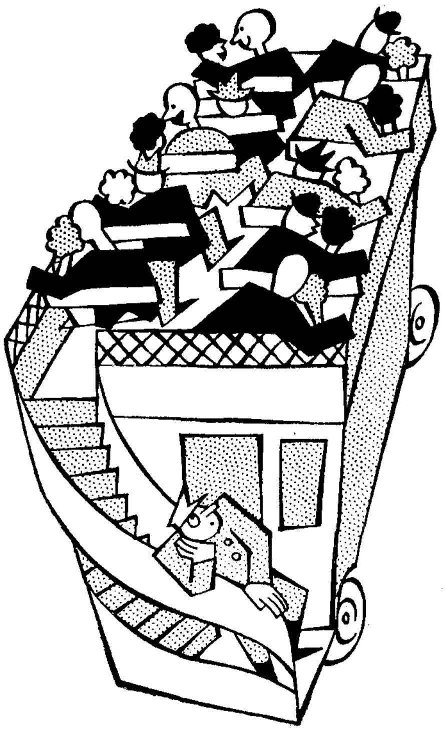

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

The Boys in the Band—A revival of Mart Crowley's 1968 play, which centers on a birthday party attended by a group of gay men. Previews begin June 3. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

By the Sea, by the Sea, by the Beautiful Sea—Manhattan Theatre Club wraps up the season with an evening of one-acts by Terrence McNally, Joe Pintauro, and Lanford Wilson. With Lee Brock, Tim Carhart, and Mary Beth Fisher. Leonard Foglia is the director. Preview on May 29. Opens May 30 at 7:30. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Making Porn—Rex Chandler plays the straight star Jack Hawk in Ronnie Larsen's play about the gay-porn business. In previews. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 239-6200.)

A Park in Our House—The New York Theatre Workshop presents a new drama by Nilo Cruz, set in Cuba in the seventies, in which a family opens its door to a seductive Russian émigré. In previews. (79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You—Christopher Durang's 1979 comedy, starring Geraldine Librandi and directed by Mark Cannistraro. Opens June 1 at 8, and continues, Saturdays only, through July 6. (The Duplex, 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. S. 255-5438.)

Stars in the Alley—Broadway players take to the street in a free outdoor concert of show tunes from the current season. (Shubert Alley, west of Broadway, between 44th and 45th Sts. May 29 at 11:30 A.M.)

A Thousand Clowns—The Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Herb Gardner's 1962 comedy stars Robert Klein, Jane Adams, and David Margulies. In previews. (Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Tokyo Can Can—A musical set in Tokyo shortly after the Second World War, written and directed by Yutaka Okada. Previews begin June 4. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Ancient History—The fateful, bittersweet arbitrariness of relationships is the rock-hard streambed under the babbling brooks of David Ives's plays; in this one, Ruth and Jack (Vivienne Benesch and Michael Rupert), a thirtysomething couple who are, as they put it, "tall, thin, and funny," show that two people who are too clever by half are likely to end up divided. The superficial point of conflict is that he is Catholic and she is Jewish, but Ives seems to be asking a much larger, more unsettling question about love: Doesn't anybody here know how to play this game? Unfortunately, the twosome is tedious, and the play, unlike the relationship, goes on forever. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes June 9.)

Arts and Leisure—A new satire, about a drama critic in crisis, by Steve Tesich. Directed by JoAnne Akalaitis. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes June 9.)

Baal—The Independent Theatre Company closes its eighth season with an energetic production of Brecht's first play, with new music by Paul Todaro, who also stars. The drama is more broadly cruel and crude than Brecht's later work, and the philosophy far less clear; the play is interesting mainly for the insight into his development which it provides. This production is somewhat unfocussed, too—for instance, it seems to be set in the nineteen-fifties, but for no apparent reason except that the period fits Mr. Todaro's rather menacing guitar music. Still, he is very engaging, and the rest of the cast is strong, particularly the versatile Independent stalwarts George Rex and Rajesh Bose. Directed by Michelle Gigante. (House of Candles Theatre, 99 Stanton St. 353-3088. Closes June 22.)

Big—The *other* new musical not nominated for a Tony. This adaptation of the movie that starred Tom Hanks and Elizabeth Perkins provides little joy, though Daniel Jenkins, as the twelve-year-old in a grownup's body, is sweet and likable. The dance numbers are full of grimly talented, grinning kiddies—it's like a midget minstrel show—and the big scene in F. A. O. Schwarz has all the spirit and spontaneity of a forced fun march. The trouble doesn't end there: Richard Maltby, Jr., and David Shire's score is melodically challenged, and John Weidman's patronizing book has lost all the movie's charm and poignancy. Directed by Mike Ockrent. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/27/96.) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Bring In da Noise, Bring In da Funk—Director George C. Wolfe and dancer-choreographer Savion Glover's heroically energetic African-American musical. (5/20/96) (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

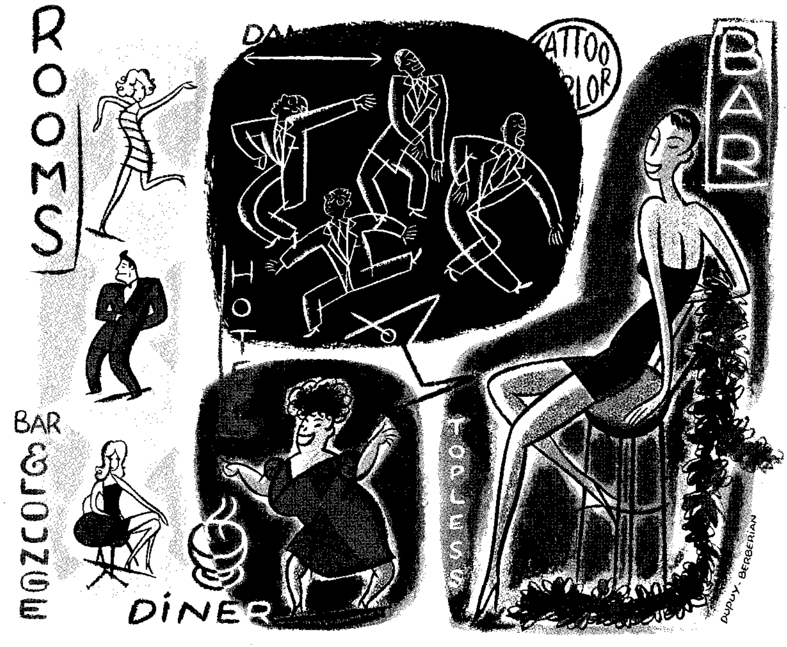
Brutality of Fact—Keith Reddin's new play, starring Leslie Lyles, Rebecca Nelson, and Scotty Bloch, takes a darkly comic look at the family ties that bind. (Camilla's, 632 Broadway, between Bleecker and Houston Sts. 475-2264. Closes May 31.)

Buried Child—This production of Sam Shepard's 1978 play, directed by Gary Sinise, comes by way of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre, and it marks the playwright's Broadway début after a writing career of thirty years. It takes place in the heartland, in the middle of the desiccated wasteland that America has become—this is Shepard's "Sour Grapes of Wrath." Set in the filthy living room (it looks more like an abandoned warehouse) of a family with a horrible secret, the play forces you to look—for three long hours—at the ugly facts of family life, but in a big Broadway house what you see is ugliness as spectacle, and this distance dilutes the play's power. Sinise has brought the laughs to the forefront—and James Gammon, who plays the patriarch (for lack of a better word) of this rancid clan, is terrifically funny—but when the laughs aren't there you feel as though you were in a theatrical Dust Bowl, waiting for the irritating, monotonous wind to stop. The cast also includes Lois Smith and Terry Kinney. (5/27/96) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 719-4099.)

Caught in the Act—The Threshold Theatre Company's international festival of one-act plays continues through June 2. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. For information, call 647-0202.)

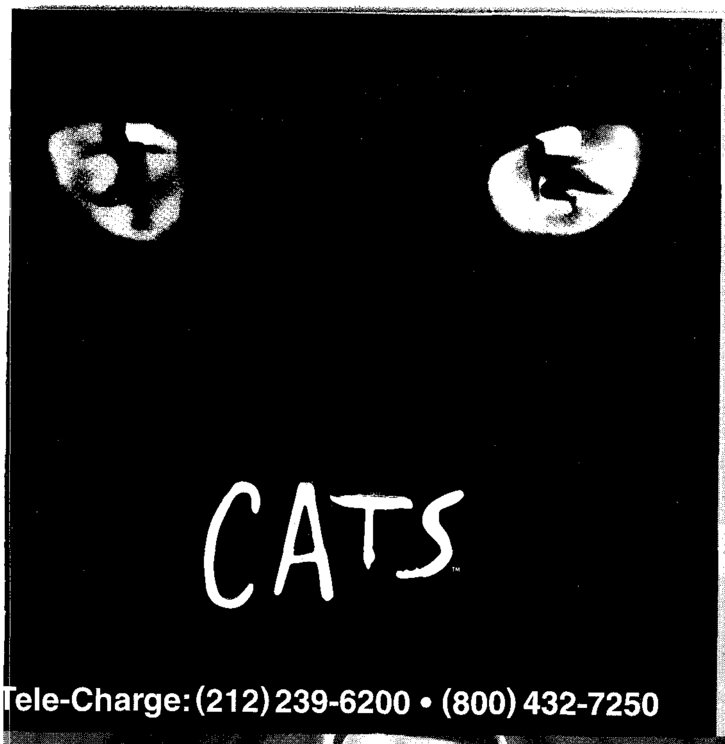
The Chang Fragments—Though Han Ong's intelligent drama about a Chinese family's assimilation takes a while to get going, it's a skillful and humorous interweaving of the characters' real and imagined stories, movingly played (by a cast led by Tina Chen and the superb Ernest Abuba) and powerfully directed (by Marcus Stern). (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes June 2.)

The Cocoanuts—The 1925 musical that starred the Marx Brothers (and became their first movie). Irving Berlin's songs, charmingly sung, are ageless, but George S. Kaufman's book isn't—particularly under the unfocussed direction of Richard Sabellico. The superb



The long-running "Smokey Joe's Café," a feast of early rock and roll by those cool cats Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller.

DUPUY BERBERIAN



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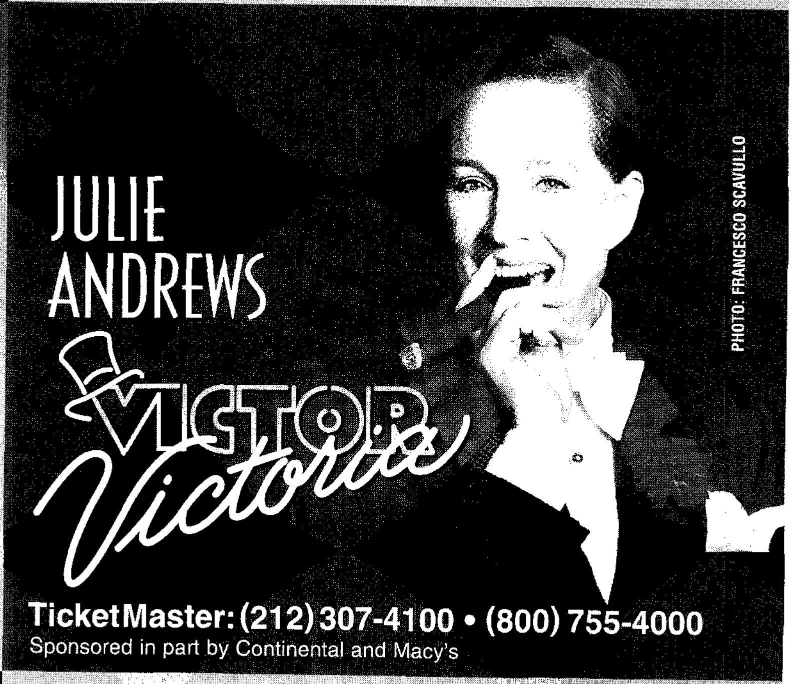
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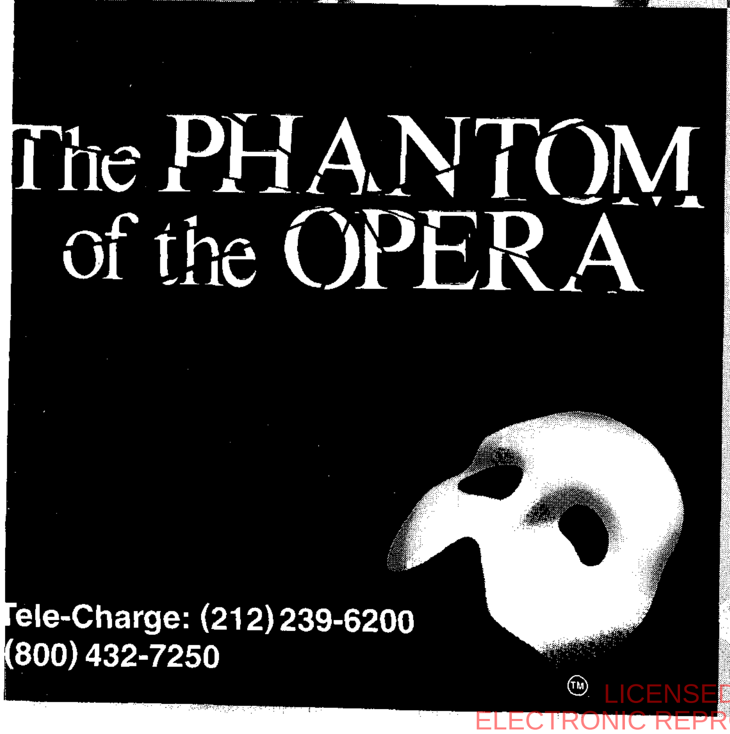
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cast deserves better. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797. Closes June 23.)

Cowgirls—By the end of this appealing, if somewhat predictable, musical comedy, three chamber musicians have been transformed into fringe-wearin', honky-tonkin' cowgirls. Mary Murfitt, the show's composer and lyricist, is hilarious as an uptight violinist learning how to shake it. Betsy Howie, who wrote the book, is also in the fine cast. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

Curtains—Stephen Bill's 1987 dark comedy about aging, directed by Scott Elliott, has moved to the John Houseman Theatre. A New Group production. (450 W. 42nd St. 339-6200.)

Dark Rapture—Eric Overmyer's thriller, starring Scott Glenn and Marisa Tomei. Scott Ellis is the director. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103. Closes June 16.)

A Delicate Balance—Decorous suburban ennui is transformed into real angst in this bracing, astringent revival of Edward Albee's 1966 play about a family that has sacrificed much of its humanity for the sake of appearances. The cast, under the fine direction of Gerald Gutierrez, is uniformly excellent. Rosemary Harris and Elaine Stritch, as sisters whose only shared trait is an ability to get under each other's skin, are marvellous foils for each other—one with a cool, deadly elegance, the other all gritty, pretension-puncturing directness. As Harris's husband, who eventually sees the emptiness where the moral center of their lives should be, George Grizzard goes quite believably from blandly accommodating and sociable to unutterably lonely. Mary Beth Hurt, John Carter, and Elizabeth Wilson make up the rest of the cast. (5/27/96) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Ensemble Studio Theatre—The second series in this year's six-week marathon of one-acts continues through June 2, with plays by Romulus Linney, Peter Basch, Stuart R. Brown, and Will Scheffer. The marathon runs through June 16. (549 W. 52nd St. 247-3405.)

A Fair Country—A neatly packaged but hollow new play by Jon Robin Baitz, about an American diplomat in South Africa. (3/11/96) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Forbidden Hollywood—Gerard Alessandrini's hit-and-miss movie-biz sendup. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum—Burt Shevelove, Larry Gelbart, and Stephen Sondheim's 1962 musical-comedy version of a Roman farce is a joke play that begs for outrageousness, but Jerry Zaks's peppy, acrylic revival seldom enters that giddy zone of comic daring. As Pseudolus, the slave who connives to win his freedom, Nathan Lane proves that he's an expert comedy technician, but he's more perspiration than inspiration. A few showstopping moments do get the audience pretty high, but ultimately the show's unrelenting insistence on not thinking can make you feel like you're being tickled to death. (5/20/96) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

God's Country—A drama about the Washington State white-supremacist group the Order, by Steven Dietz. (Synchronicity Space, 55 Mercer St. 713-5334. Closes June 9.)

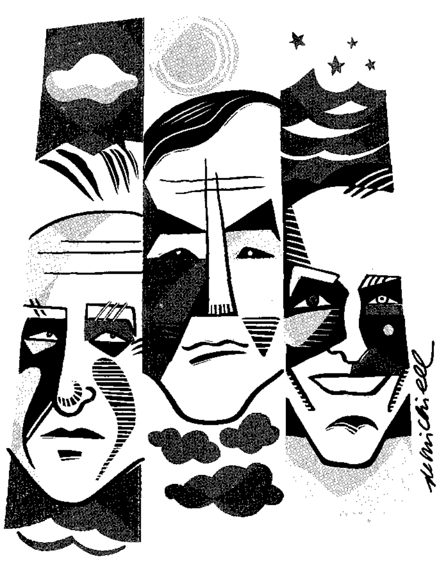
An Ideal Husband—In Oscar Wilde's hundred-and-one-year-old play, a youthful transgression comes back to threaten the career of a promising Cabinet member who is a potential Prime Minister. The man who saves the day is an apparent good-for-nothing, who, of course, turns out to be good for everything; he is played, with showy aplomb, by Martin Shaw. The play, which originally ran concurrently with "The Importance of Being Earnest," is as serious as it is frisky—it pulls the rug out from under conventional morality to find a deeper, more humane morality underneath. The rest of the delightful, mostly British cast, under the direction of Peter Hall, is well up to the Wildean wit and wisdom, and the evening flies by in a flash of epigrammatic splendor. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The King and I—In a word, magnificent. Hats off to Donna Murphy, as Anna, Lou Diamond Phillips, as the King of Siam, and everyone else (including Rodgers and Hammerstein, of course) who had a hand in this production. Christopher Renshaw directed. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

Lovers—Brian Friel's 1968 play, directed by Nye Heron and Brian Doyle. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 757-3318. Closes June 9.)

Love Thy Neighbor—In his latest two-hour monologue, Jackie Mason prowls the stage like a rabid penguin, parcelling out tough love with equal-opportunity glee. His range may be limited, but his timing is perfect, and the house rocks with laughter. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Nice Chair—A magazine researcher is sent to investigate a spiritual community devoted to silence, in a play by Susan Bernfield. (46 Walker St. 560-7387. Closes June 9.)



TRIPTYCH: *Joe Pintauro, Lanford Wilson, and Terrence McNally, who are summer neighbors in the Hamptons, drew straws one July evening a couple of years ago to determine who'd get dibs on peak beach hours. Each playwright contributed a one-act to "By the Sea, by the Sea, by the Beautiful Sea" (at Manhattan Theatre Club): all three are set on the same beach, but Pintauro's takes place at dawn, Wilson's at noon, and McNally's at dusk.*

One Hour Without Television—In Jaime Salom's comedy, a couple celebrating their anniversary turn off the TV set and end up thrashing out their relationship. Performances are in English Wednesdays through Fridays and in Spanish Saturdays and Sundays. (Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 354-1293.)

Orphée—Jean Cocteau Repertory celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary with Cocteau's 1926 adaptation of the myth. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060. Closes June 9.)

Papa—If Ernest Hemingway fell victim to the precarious machismo of the persona he created, John deGroot's one-man play falls victim to the cliché that persona has since become. Len Cariou is a fine, energetic actor, and he gives a valiantly gruff portrayal of the author, whom we encounter in the midst of a bender one day in 1959 (two years before he shot himself). But Cariou's effort to elevate his character's sad strutting and impotent anger gets sideswiped by the overloaded script, which has no surprises, way too many words, and not nearly enough fresh insights. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Radio Mambo: Culture Clash Invades Miami—A melting-pot farce written and performed by the Latino comedy troupe Culture Clash (Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas, and Herbert Siguenza), based on their interviews with a diverse cross-section of Dade County residents. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Rent—Inspired by Puccini's "La Bohème," the late Jonathan Larson's rock opera, set in a gray and dishevelled East Village loft space, stands every assumption of the traditional musical on its head. It can't support the narrative overload (eight separate stories are told), yet by the end of the evening Larson's talent has taken the audience to places the musical never ventures these days. (2/19/96) (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.)

Requiem for a Heavyweight—A drama by Rod Serling, about the later career of a big-hearted boxer. (Kraine, 85 E. 4th St. 343-0123.)

Seven Guitars—August Wilson's exciting new play, which flashes back to the final days of a Pittsburgh blues singer (Keith David), sends us stirring news of black life in the late forties. The seven guitars of the title are the seven memorable characters whose high times and dashed dreams Wilson turns into beautiful, complex music—a funky, wailing, irresistible Chicago blues. Lloyd Richards is the director. (4/15/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

State Fair—This lively, colorful stage version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1945 movie musical is a pleasure, despite some weak performances in key roles. Co-directed by James Hammerstein (son of) and Randy Skinner, who also did the choreography. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Tartuffe: Born Again—Alison Fraser, John Glover, and David Schramm lead the cast in Freyda Thomas's latest Molière adaptation, in which the antihero has become a televangelist. Directed by David Saint. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200. Closes June 23.)

Three in the Back, Two in the Head—A man falls into a web of government intrigue when he attempts to find his father's murderers, in a thriller by Jason Sherman. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes June 22.)

Tovah: Out of Her Mind—In her one-woman smorgasbord of mainly Jewish songs and sketches, the consummate musical-comedy star Tovah Feldshuh harnesses the manic energy of a gifted child acting out. Her rich, elastic voice is never off key, and her characterizations are always nimble. What the show lacks in wit or social bite Ms. Feldshuh makes up for in polish and talent. Presented by the Jewish Repertory Theatre. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000. Closes June 2.)

Valley Song—The South African playwright Athol Fugard's latest drama, about the effects of political change in his homeland, has returned to Manhattan Theatre Club. With LisaGay Hamilton and Marius Weyers. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Virgins and Other Myths—Colin Martin's one-man show—a sort of "This Gay Boy's Life." (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

We'll Meet Again—A limited engagement of Vicki Stuart's one-woman musical memoir about her childhood in England during the Second World War. Presented by the York Theatre Company. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **THE FOOD CHAIN:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **MRS. KLEIN:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. . . . **MOON OVER BUFFALO:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th

ROBERT DEMICHIELL

St. 239-6200. . . . **ROB BECKER'S DEFENDING THE CAVEMAN:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100. . . . **SHOW BOAT:** Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—May 29 at 8: "Donizetti Variations," "Moves," and "Fearful Symmetries." . . . ¶ May 30 at 8: "Concerto Barocco," the première of "Tchaikovsky Pas de Quatre," "Moves," and "Vienna Waltzes." . . . ¶ May 31 at 8: "Donizetti Variations," "Prodigal Son," and "Fearful Symmetries." . . . ¶ June 1 at 2: "Coppélia." . . . ¶ June 1 at 8: "Swan Lake," "Prodigal Son," and "Vienna Waltzes." . . . ¶ June 2 at 3: "Concerto Barocco," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Quatre," "The Waltz Project," and "In G Major." . . . ¶ June 4 at 8: "Mozartiana," "Moves," and "Fearful Symmetries." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through June 30.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE—May 29 and June 1 at 2 and 8, and May 30-31 at 8: "Cinderella." . . . ¶ June 3-4 at 8: "La Bayadère." (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000. Through June 22.)

PARSONS DANCE COMPANY—The approachably inventive troupe, in two programs of new and repertory works. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. May 29-31 at 8, June 1 at 2 and 8, and June 2 at 2 and 7:30.)

DAVID DORFMAN DANCE—The six-member company and guest artists—including one or more brothers, sisters, mothers, grandmothers, etc., for "Familiar Movements (The Family Project)," a new piece—in two programs. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. May 29-June 1 at 8 and June 2 at 3.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA—The husband-and-wife flamenco team of Martin Santangelo and Soledad Barrio returns to the barlike intimacy of Theatre 80, bringing along singers, dancers, guitarists, trim black vests, long red skirts, and eight wooden chairs. (80 St. Marks Pl. 293-4277. May 29-31 at 8 and June 1 at 7 and 10. Through June 29.)

"LOVE"—The choreographer Reggie Wilson continues his exploration of ritual and community, with an emphasis this time out on Christian varieties of mysticism and magic—and on sex. "Death and life and sex," he says, "aren't those really the great mysteries? I'm putting mysticism and humor together—for instance, having someone talk in a fire-and-brimstone voice when really they're telling raunchy jokes. I get to throw a couple of my usual curveballs, too." Including the final ring shout, an audience-participation team-competition prayer meeting. "But there's no prize or anything." (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. May 30-June 2 at 8:30.)

VICKI SCHICK AND TERE O'CONNOR—A noteworthy double bill, with both choreographers blending spoken word and dance. Shick stresses the simplicity of "In the Ordinary," which premières this week: "It's just three everyday women talking about their work, juxtaposed with the two dancers' movements—tableaux from these women's lives." The unassuming tone may be misleading, since Schick's stage presence has always communicated a modesty at odds with her swooping arabesques. In O'Connor's trio, "Mother," reworked since its January première, the choreographer has extended his trademark alterations of the ballet lexicon (the male bourrée, the over-caffeinated petit allegro) to his treatment of dialogue; in one passage, Greg Zuccolo mouths his desire to give birth, while Chrysa Parkinson and Sarah Perron do the actual speaking—in the perky tones of a shampoo commercial. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. May 30-June 2 at 8.)

"MOTHERLODE"—Choreographer Jody Oberfelder, one of the masterminds behind the 1994 "Wanted: X Cheerleaders," works with another exclusively female cast in a series of thematically linked works, including "Mother/Other" (for two mother-daughter duos), "Rock Me Mama" (for five dancers with babes in arm), and "Expectant Tango" (for seven pregnant women). (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 777-6227. May 29-June 1 at 8 and June 2 at 3.)

SCHOOL OF AMERICAN BALLET—The students who look so graceful and studious when they attend performances at their parent company, New York City Ballet, get their chance at Balanchine ("Concerto Barocco," "Valse Fantaisie," and "Rubies") in their annual workshop performance. (Juilliard Theatre, Lincoln Center. For more information, call 877-0600. June 1 at 2 and 8 and June 3 at 7.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

LOREN SCHOENBERG BIG BAND—Schoenberg, a conductor, bandleader, and saxophonist, was deep into the big-band tradition long before it became fashionable again. On hand to help him present the première of James Chirillo's "Homage" Concerto, for clarinet and jazz orchestra, will be the outstanding clarinettist Ken Peplowski. The program will also touch on works by Duke Ellington, Benny Carter, and Bill Finnegan. (New School, 55 W. 13th St. 229-5896. May 30 at 7.)

JAMES EMERY SEPTET AND THE DEEP LISTENING BAND—Guitarist James Emery, best known for his work with the String Trio of New York, has stocked his band with the cream of the new jazz scene—Marty Ehrlich (sax), Chris Speed (clarinet), Mark Feldman (violin), Michael Formanek (bass), and Gerry Hemingway (drums). They'll play four new works. The Deep Listening Band traffics in meditative music; this

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Still Life with Curtain and Flowered Pitcher (detail), c. 1899, The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

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intimate room may be the perfect place to experience them. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. May 30 at 8.)

"TROPICAL BEATLES"—Tito Puente, Celia Cruz, and a host of other salsa stars revisit the lads from Liverpool. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777 June 1 at 8.)

TOWER OF POWER—Led by saxophonists Emilio Castillo and Steve Kupka, this Oakland-based combo is celebrated for its ultra-tight horn section, which over the past twenty-five years has appeared on albums by artists ranging from Santana to Huey Lewis to Victoria Williams. Despite a constantly shifting roster, the group has produced some memorable songs, including "So Very Hard to Go" and the always in-vogue "What Is Hip?" (Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. 307-7171. June 4 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—May 30-31: **TUCK AND PATTI.** June 3-4: Before Dungeons and Dragons, back around the time of Jethro Tull, there was **STEELEYE SPAN,** a revolving cast of respected English folkies following in the footsteps of Fairport Convention. Throughout the folk-revival glory days of the seventies, the Span pumped out album after album of music that conjured up the kind of imagery that abounds at Renaissance faires. Leave your lance at home for this one, but slip into your chain mail just in case.

BROWNIES, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—In the early eighties, when punk and New Wave were losing their flavor and the airwaves were saturated with synth-pop and heavy metal, a few bands started playing vintage Vox guitars and Farfisa organs, wearing Beatle boots, and singing about the big issues—cars and beer and, of course, girls. The garage revival was short-lived, but the **LYRES,** some of the genre's ablest practitioners (here on June 1), prove that in the right hands a good riff, a solid beat, and sneering, adenoidal vocals are never tiresome. June 4: Valentine Smith.

CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—May31-June 1: Mississippi-born blues master **EDDY CLEARWATER.**

FEZ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—June 1: The smooth, secret-agent instrumental music of **LAZY BOY.** With the **HUMPHRIES.** June 4: the **KLEZMATICS.** The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—May 29-30: The **AFGHAN WHIGS.** Judging by the sound of their fourth record, "Black Love," this Cincinnati combo would have you believe that they're rock and roll's newest salute to James Brown. They're not. In fact, with suspiciously named tracks like "Honky's Ladder," these white boys are more clunky than funky. Which is not to say they're sterile: singer Greg Dulli chronicles his growing pains and aching heart with a howling falsetto, and the band has a nice way with big, sprawling guitars. May 31-June 1: The **TRAGICALLY HIP.** June 3: The veteran English pop quintet **PULP** is better known in America for singer Jarvis Cocker's exploits at a recent British awards ceremony (an eye-popping Michael Jackson number featuring a preadolescent chorus line generated a few juicy tabloid headlines) than for its acerbic breakthrough record, "Different Class," which features some stylish K-Tel packaging and hummable contents that are no less cheeky.

MANNY'S CAR WASH, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—May 30: **JUNIOR WELLS.** During the sixties and seventies, this singer and harmonica player had a seminal partnership with guitarist Buddy Guy, and he continues to grow; his recent albums are among his best ever.

MERCURY LOUNGE, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—May 30: **PENELOPE HOUSTON.** In the late seventies, as a teenager, Houston fronted one of San Francisco's most notorious punk bands, the Avengers, whose brief existence was preserved for posterity on a record produced by the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones. It's hard to believe that the same ragged voice that raged against the machine in 1977 is now back with an eponymous album of lilting songs like "Sweetheart," filled with acoustic guitars and swaying samba rhythms. June 1-2: Singer-songwriter **MARK EITZEL** remains one of the finest poets of tenderloin passion and despair since Tom Waits. Though his Bay Area band, American Music Club, is no more, his solo gigs share the same unfashionable and eccentric sound. May 4: **ME'SHELL N'DEGEOCELLO,** a bisexual, bass-playing, seventies-channelling dynamo whose songs are always in the key of life. "Plantation Lullabies," her astounding début, elegantly fused R. & B., funk, hip-hop, and pop the way Stevie Wonder used to. Her follow-up, "Peace Beyond Passion," asks tough questions about blind faith and its consequences; in a move that's got radio programmers shuddering, her new single, "Leviticus: Faggot," graphically details the struggles of a young gay boy.

S.O.B.'S, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Zydeco accordion legend **BOOZOO CHAVIS** brings the ecstatic sounds of the bayou by on May 31. June 1: **THE MIGHTY SPARROW.** Dining.

TRAMPS, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—May 30: **TOOTS AND THE MAYTALS.** If Bob Marley and the Wailers were the heart of reggae, then Frederick (Toots) Hibbert and his Maytals must surely be its soul: it was the group's 1968 hit, "Do the Reggay," that gave ska, dub, rock steady, and every other substratum of Jamaican music one all-encompassing name. Hibbert's passionate, preaching style fused Kingston with Memphis, a feat that was made multiculturally clear on "Toots in Memphis," his 1988 album of Stax/Volt covers. June 4: **ALVIN LEE** and **ERIC BURDON.** They're calling this the Best of British Blues Tour, but Best of British Attitude Tour might be more like it. Former Animals singer Burdon, the voice that launched a billion garage bands, is as snotty as ever. Lee, the onetime leader of Ten Years After, whose frenetic "I'm Going Home" was one of Woodstock's high points, remains the world's prime exponent of the quantity-is-quality theory of guitar playing.

WETLANDS, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—May 29: Allman Brothers guitarist **WARREN HAYNES.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **JULIE BUDD** wraps up her extended run on June 1. Dining.

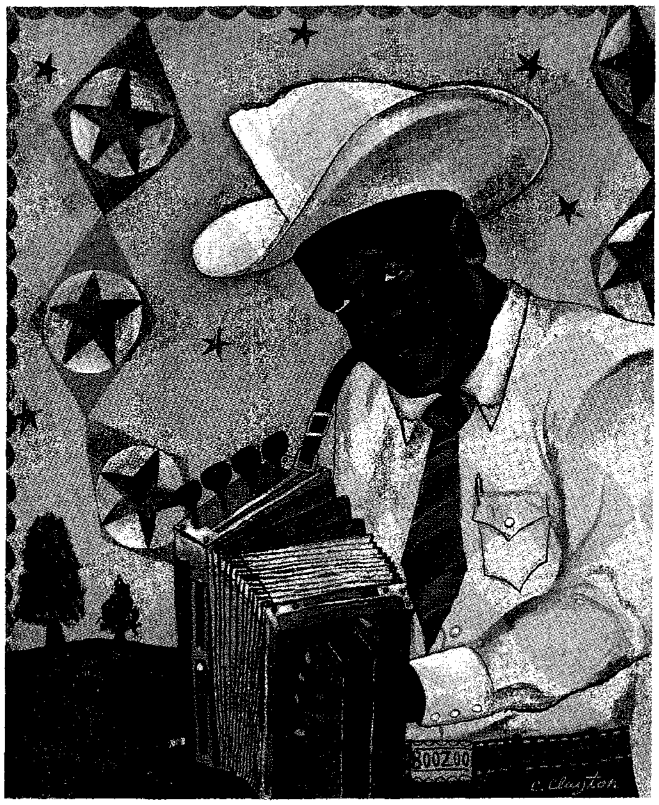
BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through June 2: the **DUKE ELLINGTON ORCHESTRA,** conducted by Barrie Lee Hall, Jr. Having withstood the loss of the maestro in 1974, and of his son Mercer (who had been at its helm) just a few months ago, the band may no longer gleam like it once did. But its repertoire is still as good as it gets. Diane Schuur takes over the room on June 4. Dining.

BRADLEY'S, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—Through June 1: four of the most happening younger players around—saxophonist **STEVE WILSON,** pianist **JONNY KING,** bassist **LARRY GRENADIER,** and drummer **BILLY DRUMMOND**—have been turning this venue into a laboratory of sorts, using its sliver of a bandstand to expand a rapport based on enthusiasm into improvisational elegance. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—After twenty-nine years at the Café Carlyle, **BOBBY SHORT** is polished to such a high gloss that he's almost blinding to behold. Everything he does is breathlessly paced: tempos accelerate, notes ascend, hands clap, teeth flash. His speech has the arcane ring that comes from travelling in glamorous circles: "You're a knockout!" "What an audience!" "How chic!" "Wow!" Just as your attention begins to flag, he shifts gears and does ten minutes of blues with cheeky conviction. But all his mannerisms really come into focus the minute he sings Cole Porter, which turns everything else into a warmup. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance.

FIFTY SEVEN FIFTY SEVEN, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A sleek piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel. Dining.

FIVE SPOT, 4 W. 31st St. (631-0100)—May 29: The **BERN NIX** trio. After his long stint with Ornette Coleman's Prime Time, guitarist Nix may have the undefinable label "harmolodic" dogging him for the rest of his career, but this supple player is no avant one-trick pony. Expect to hear more intimations of his early bop and blues training than his all-over-the-map excursions. May 31-June 1: The **FRANK MORGAN** quartet. At last it's the gorgeous alto-sax tone and classical manner, not the brushes with the law, that are making news. Morgan combines the rhythmic ethos of Charlie Parker with the languid sonority of Johnny Hodges, and he produces solos that honor both the bop he grew up with and the swing he obviously reveres. He doesn't get to town that often, so drop by and welcome him back. Dining.



News from the bayou: Boozoo Chavis, at S.O.B.'s.

CHRISTIAN CLAYTON

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Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through June 2: the **PHAROAH SANDERS** quartet. With his talent for titanic eruptions now tempered by an equal flair for soulful ballads, Sanders has become the complete saxophonist. It's been quite an evolution. Once a roaring iconoclast—he used to make even late-period Coltrane sound reserved—he now embraces the audience with a colossal tone and naked emotion. A week of Sanders can cure what ails you. **CHARLES LLOYD** (starting June 4), every hippie's favorite tenor saxophonist, has unfortunately failed to maintain the crossover audience he cultivated during the sixties. He's still guilty of some head-in-the-clouds posturing, but when he comes down to earth he can be entrancing. With pianist Michel Petrucciani. Mondays belong to **LES PAUL.** Dining.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—An Old New York kind of place, with dark wood panelling, white tablecloths, and brass figurine lamps. May 29-June 1: Piano and bass with Ronny White and Boots Maleson. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—**SAM RIVERS** (May 29-30) has earned his patriarchal status. An iconoclast for Blue Note in the sixties, loft-jazz activist in the seventies, stringent bandleader in the eighties, and classicist in the nineties, this saxophonist and composer is still a rebel who shows few signs of tiring: he's always two giant steps ahead of the bandwagon and always fascinating.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The preëminent interpreter of the great American songbook, **MARY CLEERE HARAN** (in through late June), is an artist of almost supernatural poise. For this engagement she turns her unblinking eye to the brief but inspired musical partnership of Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields. Unlike many club singers, Haran knows the value of understatement; she uses her smile not to wow the room but to light up her songs. She also loves to talk, and some of her monologues turn into pocket essays (she may be the only singer who can work Proust and Mel Brooks into the same sentence). Closed Mondays.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through June 2: **CARMEN LUNDY.** Jazz singing seems to have valiantly fought its way back to the foreground; Lundy has spent the better part of the past ten years gathering critical kudos, sporadically recording, and then slipping to the sidelines. She still has the goods that attracted attention in the first place, and, now that assured vocalists have become hot commodities, this could be her moment. The **STEVE TURRE** sextet takes over on June 4. Dining.

Tavern on the Green, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—The **ILLINOIS JACQUET** big band is currently in the midst of a two-week run. Now in his seventies, the tenor saxophonist is a survivor whose career high points include his famous solo on Lionel Hampton's recording of "Flying Home" and his screeching, stomping tenor battles in the fifties, as a member of Jazz at the Philharmonic. In 1983, he decided to put together a big band, and it has become a smooth, highly popular Basie-like combo, easy to dance to and most notable for its leader's sumptuous sound. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through June 2: the **NICHOLAS PAYTON** quintet. Trumpeter Payton pulled off a neat trick on his recent "Gumbo Nouveau." Revamping its updated New Orleans standards as modal-bop swingers may have had the earmarks of a neo-trad gimmick, but by combining smarts and some first-class playing he turned it into a thoughtful, heartfelt valentine to his home town. Seems like yesterday that Payton was just another Wynton wannabe; now he's a contender. **ROY HARGROVE** begins a weeklong run (which begins with a quartet and then morphs into a big band) on June 4. Feisty, historically aware, and blessed with a brassy, ringing tone, this trumpeter has everything except a defining personality. He's young yet, but his boundless energy bodes well for the future. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

TABLES FOR TWO

Col Legno, 231 E. 9th St. (777-4650)—The front of this easygoing East Village trattoria is an airy dining room that doubles as an art gallery. (The current show is a group of color photographs by Lisa Demas.) The back is the kitchen, an expanse of cavalierly underused space, punctuated by a lonely table, in which a pair of chefs can be seen pacing the terra-cotta tiles beneath bunches of dried sage and iron pots. Not counting them, Col Legno is a three-man operation, staffed by the owner, an amiable New Yorker named Chris Trilivas; a gracious busboy; and a brilliant Buster Keaton of a waiter who recites specials, pours wine, brings bread, juggles plates, and reads minds, but hardly ever smiles. The brief menu offers about a half-dozen choices each of antipasti, vegetables, pastas, grilled dishes, and pizzas. The latter bake in a wood-burning oven that stands in the corner like a giant bleached gourd and gives the restaurant its name: "col legno"—the term that violinists use for striking the strings with the back of the bow—means "with the wood."

The food is likely to ignite fantasies of alfresco suppers in the Tuscan hills (and the wanton wasting of space enhances the vacation aura): creamy white beans simmered in a glass flask with white wine, sage, and garlic; baby artichokes flattened, fried, and dressed with lemon and olive oil; chicken spatchcocked and grilled over rosemary branches; brook trout daubed with sage butter. The pasta sauces, such as the ground wild boar (surprisingly mild) on the pappardelle, or the wild mushrooms and mint (just a whisper) on the tagliatelle, are superior. Dessert is simple: gelato, tiramisù, or fresh fruit.

With the one exception, the place is all smiles. (Open for dinner nightly except Mondays. Entrées $12-$16.)

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—May 29-June 1: The **JOHN ABERCROMBIE** trio. Working in an organ trio over the last few years has toughened up Abercrombie's guitar playing. The lyricism that characterized his ECM heyday is still in place; his wispiness, however, has been replaced by bluesy muscle. He can still be a soft touch with a Jim Hall-like sensitivity to harmony and tone, but when he opens up the floodgates, watch out.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—A rarity among jazz clubs: somewhere you'd go to eat even if there were no music. Through June 1: piano and bass with **HILTON RUIZ** and **ANDY MC CLOUD.**

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—After a painstaking ten-year conservation-and-restoration effort, the Gubbio Studiolo (from the palace of Duke Federigo da Montefeltro), which was dismantled in 1967, has been reinstalled. This masterful trompe-l'oeil Renaissance chamber, with intricately inlaid wood panels that give the illusion of open cupboards containing books, scientific instruments, and other objects, is one of only two known examples of such a room. Accompanying the installation is an exhibit covering the restoration efforts and the fifteenth-century woodworking technique of intarsia, used to create the study. . . . ¶ "Genoa: Drawings and Prints 1530-1800." The spectacular works of the Roman Baroque have always stolen the spotlight from what was going on in the sticks. This well-curated exhibition of prints and drawings from the Republic of Genoa turns up some lesser-known masters—Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, Luca Cambiaso, Bernardo Strozzi—who are by no means second-rate. Through July 7. . . . ¶ "Picturing Paradise: Colonial Photography of Samoa, 1875-1925." Through Aug. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. "Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation" includes a hundred and thirty paintings, and nearly as many works on paper, depicting lovers, wives, poets, art dealers, and children. (See also Galleries—Uptown.) . . . ¶ "Come Sunday: Photographs by Thomas Roma." A striking series of black-and-white pictures, taken between 1991 and 1994 at fifty-two black churches in Brooklyn, documents the serious work of worship. In a typical print, the viewer's eye travels from the top of a carefully coiffed head bowed in prayer to a lacy dress, down to thumbs gripping a marred pew, over to a few incongruous action-figure toys, and back to a barrel-chested man staring out unreadably. Throughout the series, the physical details—the sheen on skin, the pale leather underside of a shoe, a huge metal fan—are what ground these complex, emotion-borne images. Through June 18. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present." The first exhibition of this scope on this topic in New York presents work by twenty-eight artists, from forties studio portraits by Salla Casset and Seydou Keita to more personal and experimental photographs from the eighties and nineties by Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé, Mody Sory Diallo, and Iké Udé. One section of the show focusses on pictures published in *Drum*, the influential magazine founded in South Africa in 1951 and subsequently published in Nigeria, Ghana, and East and Central Africa as well. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—A retrospective of a hundred assemblages, constructed from scavenged street and flea-market materials, by Edward Kienholz (1927-94) and Nancy Reddin Kienholz. Through June 2. . . . ¶ "An American Story," a chronological survey of twentieth-century paintings and sculptures, both well-known and obscure, from the museum's collection. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—"Converging Cultures: Art & Identity in Spanish America." An intelligently curated, wonderfully intriguing exhibition of Latin American art from the sixteenth century through the early twentieth, focussing on the interpenetrations of native and colonial cultures. Through July 14. . . . ¶ "The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured." Through June 9. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St.—Hanne Darboven's 1980-83 "Kulturgeschichte (Cultural History) 1880-1983" is an enormous installation of photographs and textual materials—some sixteen hundred panels—as well as various "elements/sculptures." It's as if the artist had seen Gerhard Richter's similarly encyclopedic "Atlas" here last year and decided that she had to one-up him. More explicitly than Richter's, her work is rooted in the procedures of first-generation sixties Conceptualism. Enumeration—the simple counting or listing of one thing after another, ad infinitum—was a favored mode, and Darboven one of its most dogged practitioners. In the late sixties, she concentrated on what became her signature habit of numerical writing: "I only use numbers," she said, "because it is a way of writing without describing. . . . It has nothing to do with mathematics. Nothing!" Her art seems, intentionally or otherwise, to mimic the symptoms of certain obsessive-compulsive disorders, just as Conceptualism, in its pertinacious literal-mindedness, flirts openly with absurdism. Through June 23, when Dia closes for the summer; the show reopens Sept. 12. (Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities." Though many of the giants of the postwar American scene (Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Eva Hesse, et al.) were Jews, Jewishness per se has seldom been considered appropriate material for serious art. No doubt this assimilationist mind-set accounts for the often confrontational and sardonic temper of much of the work here, which alternately embraces and eviscerates stereotypes. Elaine Reichek embroiders a faux-Colonial sampler with the quip "If you think you can be a little bit Jewish, you think you can be a little bit pregnant"; Cary Leibowitz's text painting baldly asks, "I'm a Jew, how 'bout U?"; Rhonda Lieberman, in collaboration with Leibowitz, fashions Hanukkah items from Chanel accessories. The show has some of the dourness typical of exhibitions that address identity politics, but the prevailing mood suggests a bunch of Borscht Belt comics going for advanced degrees at CalArts. Through July 14. . . . ¶ "Marc Chagall, 1907-1917." A selection of oils, gouaches, and drawings from the painter's early years in Vitebsk, St. Petersburg, and Paris. Through Aug. 4. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 9; Sundays, 10 to 5:45.)

National Museum of the American Indian, 1 Bowling Green—"Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans" includes historical photographs, with commentaries by writer Leslie Marmon Silko, artist and curator Gerald McMaster, and painter Jaune Quick-To-See Smith. Also on view are works by contemporary Native American photographers Jolene Rickard, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, and David Neel. Through July 21. . . . ¶ Twenty photographic and mixed-media works make up "Ancestral Memories: A Tribute to Native American Survival." Through July 21. (Open daily, 10 to 5.)

Queens Museum of Art, Flushing Meadow Park—"Larry Sultan: Pictures from Home," a large series of recent photographs of the artist's parents, rephotographed and enlarged stills from home movies, and stories and reflections about the whole family thang. Through July 7. . . . ¶ The Gertrude Ederle Amphitheatre, the 1939-40 World's Fair ruin that is in the process of demolition, is the subject of a Dennis Adams installation. Through July 7. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

Queens Museum at the Bulova Corporate Center, 75-20 Astoria Blvd., Jackson Heights—"Richard Rothman: Studies from Nature," selections from an ongoing series in which the photographer travels the outer boroughs and the suburbs, examining the relationship between vanishing nature and sprawling, suffocating development. Through Aug. 10. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 7 to 7; Saturdays, 11 to 4.)

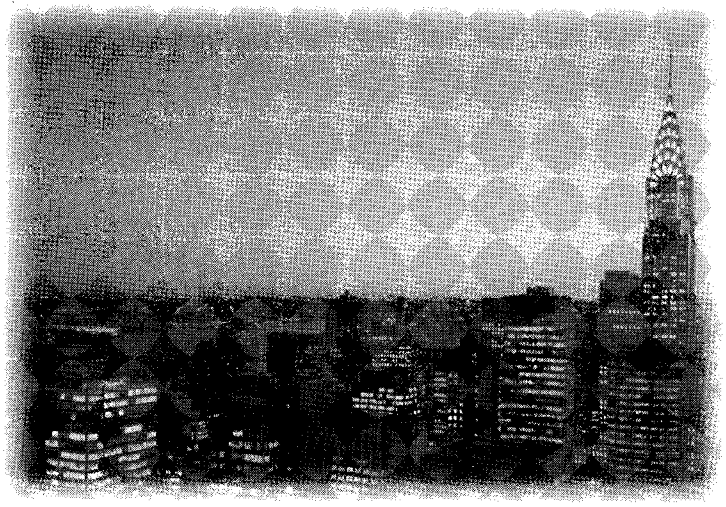
GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Gregory Gillespie—What a weird, unsettling vision this artist has. Naïve art-historical references, encompassing everything from Arcimboldo to Keith Haring, run riot in these new works; nothing seems to go together. Gillespie has intensity, technical virtuosity—everything but a style. And that's something of a relief in this era of grimly uniform solo shows. Through June 7. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. . . . ¶ Selected works by Gillespie, from 1971 to the present, are at Kind, 136 Greene St., through June 8.)

David Hockney—Two shows, a couple of floors apart. At Robert Miller: paintings and photographs of paintings, the latter made with a large-format camera. At Emmerich: small paintings and "Snails Space," a large-scale "painting as performance" whose fanciful landscape extends onto the floor around it; the whole environment is lit with six theatre lights on a nine-minute cycle of changing colors, which interact with the varied pigments and bring the painting to life. Both shows through June 15. (41 E. 57th St.)

John Koch (1909-78)—Realistic oil paintings of posh interiors in which the idle rich dabble at music (a sensitive-looking string trio pauses for tea) and art (nude models pose in the parlor). Koch was a facile paint handler who favored golden late-afternoon light—an Andrew Wyeth for the Upper East Side. The worst of these paintings, such as a still-life of a classical bust and a vase of lilies, come within a hair's breadth of kitsch,



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and even the best have about them a depressing, stifled air. Dorothy Parker, trying to be kind, called them "a delight to the eye and a joy to the memories, in case you have such well-bred memories." Through June 7. (Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

"Pablo Picasso: Academic and Anti-Academic (1895-1900)"—A fascinating exhibition comprising the very first Picassos, beginning with a superb pencil drawing of a male nude which the thirteen-year-old Pablo submitted as a part of the entrance requirements to Barcelona's Llotja School of Fine Arts. Spanish art students weren't permitted to view the opposite sex naked; in lieu of female models, the males were given adolescent Gypsy boys, whom Picasso endows with a magical inner life. In addition to the academic works, the exhibit includes some precious doodles, such as a deft little oil sketch of three roosters. Through June 15. (Yoshii, 20 W. 57th St. . . . **NOTE:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St., has Picasso oil portraits from 1920 to 1970. Through June 29. . . . Krugier, 41 E. 57th St., has works in several mediums from the fifties and sixties, along with photographs of the artist by David Douglas Duncan. Through June 30.)

Short List—**GIOVANNI ANSELMO,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. Open Mondays; through June 1. . . . **AVIGDOR ARIKHA,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. Open Mondays; through June 15. . . . **JOSÉ BEDIA,** Adams, 50 W. 57th St. Through June 7. . . . **ROSS BLECKNER,** Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through June 29. . . . **JOHN CHAMBERLAIN** and **ELIZABETH MURRAY,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. Both shows through June 8. . . . **SANDRO CHIA,** Janis, 110 W. 57th St., and Grand Salon, 83 Grand St. Through June 8 and June 1, respectively. . . . **ROBERT GOODNOUGH,** De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St. Through June 15. . . . **WIFREDO LAM,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. Through June 15. . . . **GEORGE MACIUNAS,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. Through June 22. . . . **MATTA,** Martin, 23 E. 73rd St. Through June 15. . . . **MALCOLM MORLEY,** Janis, 110 W. 57th St. Through June 8. . . . **NANCY O'CONNOR,** Sculpture Center, 167 E. 69th St. Through June 7. . . . **DANIEL SPOERRI,** Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. Through June 15. . . . **FRANCISCO TOLEDO,** Associated American Artists, 20 W. 57th St. Through May 31. . . . **ANNE TRUITT,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. Through June 21. . . . **JOHN WILDE,** Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. Through June 1.

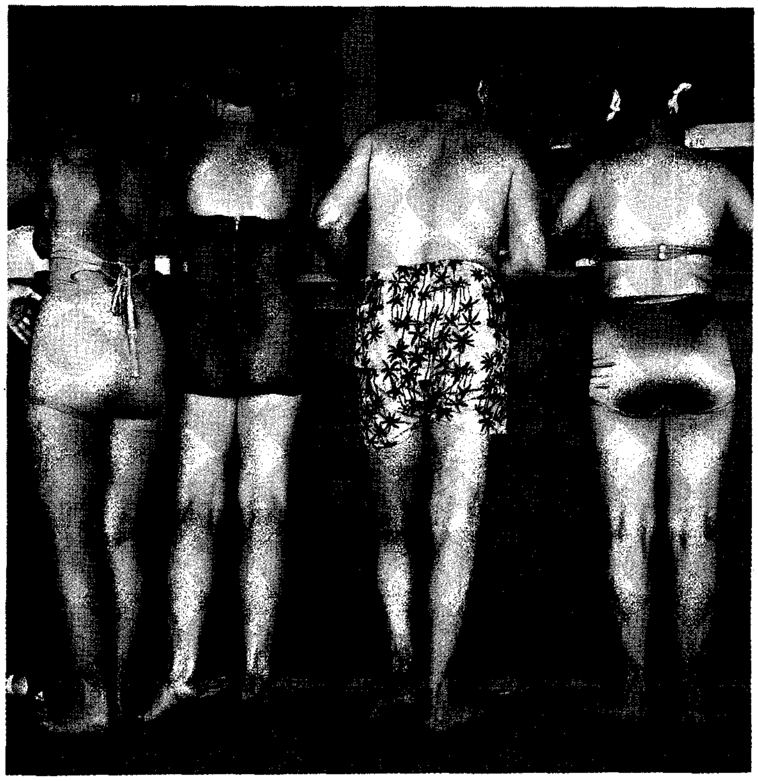
GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Ashley Bickerton—"Back to the Wall," new paintings by an artist who made his reputation in the Neo-Geo movement of the eighties. For viewers accustomed to his sleek, skillfully fabricated objects of yore, these pictures will come as a shock: still meticulously crafted, they are nonetheless almost passionately ugly (but often direly funny) in their splenetic view of human folly. A recurrent theme is our obsession with reconfiguring the body, whether through athletic regimens, plastic surgery, or glamour makeovers. Through June 1. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway.)

Squeak Carnwath—Paintings from the past year, in which sentences and lists of words and numbers float alongside pictographs—hands, feet, birds, beds, chairs—above heavily worked, often luminous grounds. Through June 15. (Beitzel, 102 Prince St.)

Willem de Kooning—For many, de Kooning's sculptures represent the least convincing aspect of his œuvre: "Clamdigger," for example, one of the best known (it's not on view here), is distressingly evocative of a John Carpenter bogeyman—not scary, just ugly. This show demonstrates that on a monumental scale de Kooning's sculptures can be not only good but possibly even great. The three huge pieces in the main gallery are cast-bronze enlargements of his first clay sculptures; their bulbous shapes are vaguely (and grotesquely) feminine, and the sweep of their abstracted "limbs" is breathtaking. Through June 30. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6. . . . ¶ A show of paintings from the eighties is at C & M Arts, 45 E. 78th St., through June 1.)

William Giersbach—For a quarter of a century this gifted, eccentric artist has been exploring the aesthetic terrain where thought and image converge. His painted books, maps, and cards bristle with Duchampian humor: a postcard titled "The World/The Firmament," for example, is a rectangle of starry night sky with a little hole in the middle to look through. His new work introduces a deeply personal note of pathos. A map of the artist's life, with an autobiographical fragment scrawled across its edge, is disarmingly candid, beautifully painted, and incomplete—as every life must be. Through June 1. (55 Mercer Street Gallery.)



"North Avenue Beach" (1952), by Yasuhiro Ishimoto, in "Chicago Photography, 1935-1965," at the Danziger gallery.

Damien Hirst—"No Sense of Absolute Corruption," a bravura sideshow by the baddest of British bad-boy artists. In addition to some of his signature animal carcasses floating in formaldehyde, the show includes a gigantic ashtray filled with cigarette butts, several spin paintings, and a colorful contraption that keeps a beach ball perpetually aloft. For all its shock tactics and viscera, the exhibition is surprisingly funny. The works' implicit question: Just how far does an artist have to go to get the public's attention these days? Through June 15. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St.)

Toba Khedoori—Spectacularly fussy architectural drawings executed on huge sheets of paper coated with wax, which picks up a fascinating collection of hair and dust. The satisfying funkiness of the ground makes the incised purity of the artist's line seem slightly insane. Through June 15. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St.)

Yayoi Kusama—A survey of paintings, collages, and soft sculptures from the fifties and sixties by a pioneering Japanese minimalist. Elegant formalism (a famous square canvas covered with airmail stickers) abuts earthy sensuality (a chair upholstered in white canvas fingers that undulate like the tentacles of a sea anemone). A series of paintings of "infinity nets"—thousands of tiny overlapping circles—demonstrates the artist's interest in such painterly questions as color and composition without compromising her cool credentials. Through June 21. (Cooper, 155 Wooster St.)

Pepón Osorio—"Badge of Honor," an installation of two rooms side-by-side: a nearly empty prison cell with a bed suspended from the wall and shoes on the floor, and a fantastically bright teen-age boy's bedroom, with reflective Mylar and totally postered walls. A black-and-white video of an inmate from Northern State Penitentiary, in New Jersey, is projected in the cell, while a similar video of the prisoner's son plays in the bedroom. Through June 15. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St.)

Robert Ryman—The maximal minimalist has discovered design and (are you sitting down?) color, albeit the palest possible shades of beige and gray, which are painted over in his signature white, in every possible degree of reflectivity. The exhibit is exceptionally well mounted, with soaring interior architecture, designed by the artist, which gives every painting its own wall. And these works deserve special treatment: looking at Ryman takes time, but the longer you linger the more intensely they glow. Through June 21. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St.)

Jason Simon—"Spirits," an installation of photographs, sculptures, and audio which addresses the cigarette habit as a manifestation of artistic and intellectual temperaments. (Think graduate students in dark cafés sipping cappuccinos, smoking Gitanes, and underlining "Being and Time.") The mode of presentation is dry but not didactic—Simon treats what must be his own pet pleasure/affliction with mordant humor. Through June 9. (Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Rachel Whiteread—Since she won Britain's prestigious Turner Prize, in 1993, for a concrete cast of the interior space of a house in the East End of London, this artist has had a spectacular ride to the top of the heap. In this solo show, she continues filling up empty spaces to create ghostly non-objects—anti-bookshelves in plaster, an anti-bathtub in rubber—which seem to have more heft and substance than the real objects that were pressed up against them. Through June 18. (Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St.)

Short List—**Diti Almog**, Boesky & Callery, 51 Greene St. Through June 8. . . . **Michael Ashkin**, Keenan, 494 Broadway. Through June 8. . . . **Louise Bourgeois**, The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Open Wednesday evenings until 8; through June 8. . . . **Karen Carson**, Maynes, 225 Lafayette St. Through June 29. . . . **Chen Zhen**, Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. Through June 8. . . . **Chuck Connelly**, Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. Through June 4. . . . **David Deutsch**, Gorney, 100 Greene St. Through June 22. . . . **Spelman Evans Downer**, Arstark, 568 Broadway. Through June 28. . . . **Vernon Fisher**, Cowles, 420 West Broadway. Through June 8. . . . **Julio Galán**, Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6; through June 30. . . . **Lucy Gunning**, Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6; through June 15. . . . **Kristin Oppenheim**, 303 Gallery, 89 Greene St. Through June 15. . . . **Mimmo Paladino**, Sperone Westwater, 121 and 142 Greene St. Through June 15. . . . **Brian Tolle**, Basilico Fine Arts, 26 Wooster St. Through June 1.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Christie's—An auction of fine wines, presented jointly with Zachys, includes an extraordinary collection of eight top-growth Bordeaux in imperial, all in original wooden cases. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000. June 1.)

Sotheby's—A sale of Judaica: paintings, ritual objects, documents, and rare books. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000. June 4.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrew Bush—Bush's show here last year—photographs of old envelopes presented in antique negative-holders or printing frames—had a lot going for it: nostalgia, fetishism, and engaging trompe-l'oeil. The super-enlarged calling cards now on view, by contrast, fail to find that quirky pop-culture resonance—the artist calls them "portraits," but they feel more like rough sketches. It's tempting, though, to put in a call to "Buster Cooey, Electric." Through June 1. (Saul, 560 Broadway.)

Barbara Kasten—Cyanotypes, Polaroids, and regular Cibachrome prints depicting ancient ruins, artifacts, and fossils. Greek tanagra figurines are rendered nearly abstract in dazzling, stainlike fuschias, indigos, and tangerines. Photograms of amphorae from the Museum of Underwater Archeology, in Bodrum, Turkey, seem to float in a sea of brushed-on cyan. It takes a little time for this artful treatment of science and history to register, but when it does, it's intoxicating. Through June 15. (Richardson, 560 Broadway.)

Louis Stettner—Dreamlike images of travellers seen through the windows of trains waiting in Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal: reading a newspaper, slumped in a nap, playing bridge (a bad hand), or simply lost in weariness. The quietly recorded details—such as the cropping of the heads of waiters and waitresses by the windows (since they're always standing) or the smoothing of a stiff white apron before the influx of club-car patrons—make these pictures riveting. Through June 1. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St.)

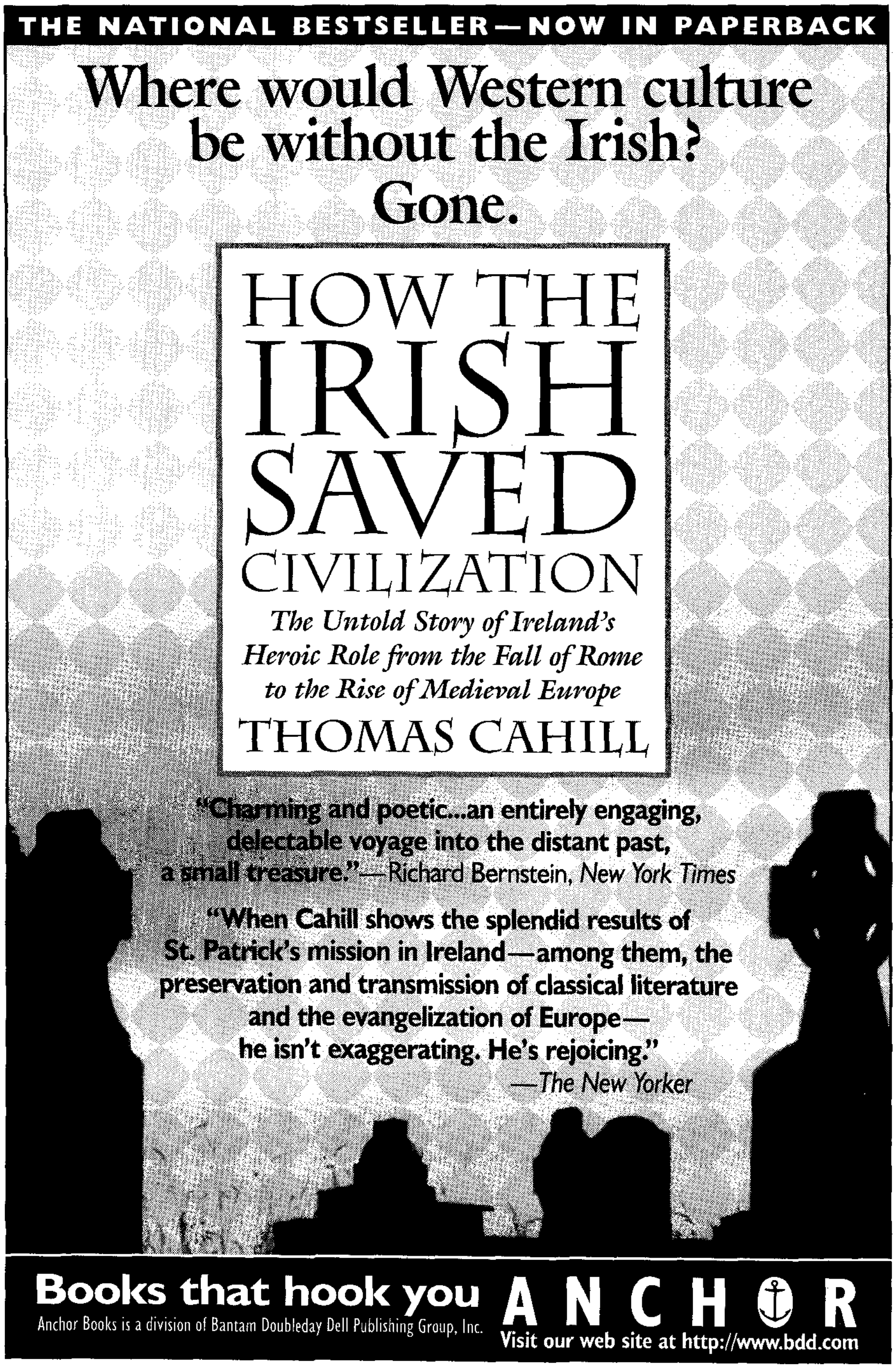
Josef Sudek (1896-1976)—The Czech photographer experimented with pigment printing in the forties and fifties, and the slower process made his poetic, precisely observed still-lifes—loaves of bread and eggs, glasses of water with roses, in chromas from ochre to olive to sepia—by turns more romantic and more sombre. Trees in the gardens of Prague and Troja castles, however, are rendered in subtler tones of blue and charcoal, giving them an air of mystery mixed with modernity. Through July 7. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

"Chicago Photography, 1935-1965"—Pictures by thirty artists who worked and taught there, including experimental works by Moholy-Nagy and Kepes, abstractions by Siskind and Metzker, beachgoers by Yasuhiro Ishimoto, and kids at play by Art Shay. Through May 31. (Danziger, 130 Prince St.)

"Paul Himmel and the Brodovitch Circle"—Himmel worked for *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *Fortune*, and several other magazines from the forties through the sixties; his photographs exemplified the kind of movement demanded by Alexey Brodovitch, the renowned art director of *Bazaar*. This show, which concentrates on his noncommercial work, includes many pictures by other leading lights, such as Robert Frank, Louis Faurer, Lisette Model, Bruce Davidson, Irving Penn, Lillian Bassman, Richard Avedon, Martin Munkacsi, and Ted Croner. Through June 22. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St.)

Short List—**Clegg & Guttmann**, American Fine Arts, 22 Wooster St. Through June 8. . . . **Bruce Cratsley**, A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. Open daily, 10 to midnight; through July 30. . . . **Gerard Fieret**, Mann, 42 E. 76th St. Through June 29. . . . **Ralph Gibson**, Castelli, 420 West Broadway. Through July 26. . . . **Emmet Gowin** and **Diana Michener**, Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. Through June 29. . . . **Jan Groover**, Borden, 560 Broadway. Through June 22. . . . **Helmar Lerski**, Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. Through June 22. . . . **Herbert List**, Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. Through June 15. . . . **Danny Lyon** and **Susan Fenton**, Lowinsky, 578 Broadway. Both shows through June 29. . . . **Inge Morath**, Leica, 670 Broadway. Opens Saturdays at noon; through June 12. . . . **Frederic Ohringer**, Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. Through July 12. . . . **Aleksandr Rodchenko**, Karg, 100 Greene St. Through May 31.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the National Museum of the American Indian, the Queens Museum of Art, and the Queens Museum at the Bulova Corporate Center.)



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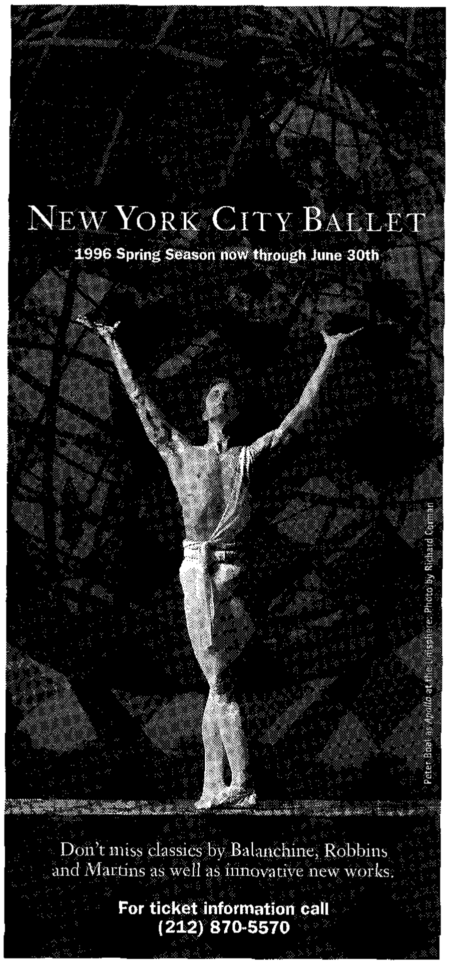
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CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

American Opera Projects—Presenting excerpts from "Faust." (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. May 30 at 1. Admission by contribution.)

"Dead End Avenue"—A music-theatre work by William Schimmel and Micki Goodman, who describe it as "an ontological journey with the accordion as centerpiece." (Anahid Sofian Studio, 29 W. 15th St. June 1-2 at 8. For information about tickets, call 876-0827. *Through June 9.*)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Cellist Lynn Harrell often speaks of his instrument in terms of the human voice—a natural point of reference, since his father, Mack Harrell, was a well-known lieder singer (he also appeared for a while on the baritone roster of the Metropolitan Opera). So it's appropriate to find him playing Ernest Bloch's "Schelomo," a mournful piece for cello and orchestra which Bloch initially conceived as a vocal work. At the beginning of 1916, the composer was planning a large-scale piece reflecting the pessimistic passages of Ecclesiastes—"vanity of vanities; all is vanity"—but he was having difficulty figuring out how to capture the requisite hopelessness in song. A chance encounter with the cellist Alexander Barjansky provided a flash of inspiration, and six weeks later "Schelomo" was finished, with a solo cello rather than a singer portraying King Solomon. In addition to the Bloch, Kurt Masur conducts Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 (the "Romantic"), in the orchestra's final subscription concerts of the season. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. May 30 and June 1 at 8 and May 31 at 11 A.M.)

Orpheus—The conductorless chamber orchestra plays Stravinsky's D-Major Concerto for Strings and Tchaikovsky's "Andante Cantabile" for cello and strings (featuring Melissa Meell). Richard Goode is the soloist in Mozart's Piano Concertos in B-Flat Major (K. 456) and D Minor (K. 466). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. May 29 at 8.)

Bachanalia Festival Orchestra—Violinist Nina Beilina leads Bach's D-Minor Concerto for Two Violins (in which she is joined by Emil Chudnovsky), David Kovanovsky's "Shlof Mein Kind," Prokofiev's "Overture on Hebrew Themes" (featuring clarinettist Michael Salm), Pavel Haas's "Studie" for string orchestra, and Igor Frolov's "Concert Fantasy on Gershwin's 'Porgy and Bess' " (featuring Ms. Beilina). (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. May 29 at 8.)

Brooklyn Philharmonic—Dennis Russell Davies conducts the orchestra, the New York Choral Society, and soloists. May 31-June 1 at 8: Zemlinsky's "Symphonische Gesänge" (to texts by poets of the Harlem Renaissance) and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. Bass-baritone Simon Estes is the featured soloist. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100.) . . . ¶ June 2 at 3: Schumann's C-Minor Mass and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.)

Central City Chorus—Charles Pilling directs an all-American concert that includes works by Barber, Randall Thompson, and Copland (his "In the Beginning"). (Central Presbyterian Church, Park Ave. at 64th St. June 3 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

RECITALS

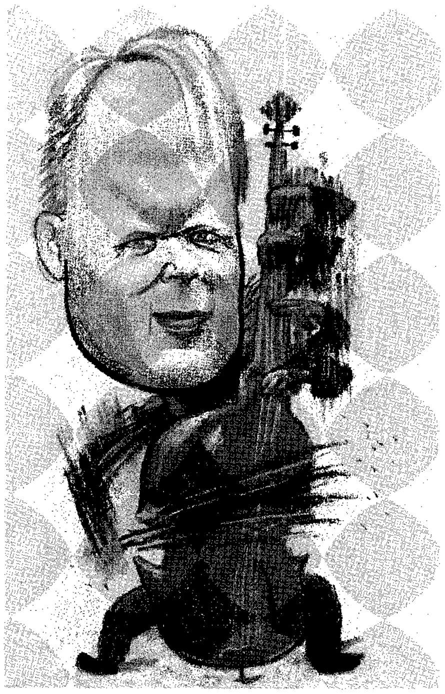
Bargemusic—Flutist Carol Wincenc, violist Paul Neubauer, and harpist Nancy Allen team up to perform works by Glazunov, Takemitsu, Debussy, and Joan Tower, among others. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. May 30 at 7:30 and June 2 at 4.)

Renée Fleming—The soprano offers songs by Schubert, Strauss, Poulenc (his "Fiançailles pour Rire"), and Turina, as well as a set based on Emily Dickinson texts, by Ricky Ian Gordon, Robert Beaser, Jake Heggie, and Ian Copland. Pianist Helen Yorke assists. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. May 30 at 8.)

Stanley Irwin—Baritone, in a recital of music by Ravel and David Ott, among others. (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. May 30 at 8.)

Lunchtime in the Park—Free outdoor concerts in Bryant Park, at 12:30 most Mondays and Wednesdays, and some Fridays, through the end of August. On May 31, soprano Lauren Flanigan presents a recital, accompanied by pianist Kemal Kahn. (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.)

Asian Performing Arts—A series of lectures and performances of music and dance from Asia and the Middle East continues through the end of June. This week's offerings include traditional and contemporary music from Japan, played by the Inoue Chamber Ensemble (May 31 at 3), a recital of Chinese folk music (June 1 at 3), and a music-and-dance collaboration about the Israeli kibbutz experience, featuring composer Rea Mochiach and choreographer Neta Pulvermacher (June 3 at 5:30). (Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center. No tickets necessary.)



Cellist Lynn Harrell, with the New York Philharmonic.

Locrian Chamber Players—The contemporary-music group offers works by Rorem, Piazzolla (his "Five Tango Sensations," featuring bandonionist Raul Juarena), Nao Takano, David Macdonald, Ilan Rechtman, and John Kreckler. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. June 1 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

Tali Roth—Aficionados of the classical guitar will congregate on City Island for a four-hour marathon survey (including two intermissions) of the great names of guitar literature—Bach, Sor, Albéniz, Rodrigo, and on and on. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478. June 2 at noon.)

Bang on a Can Festival—On June 2, an even longer marathon peeks into the nooks and crannies of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the very recent. The performers include pianist Katherine Supové, Toby

AHMET GÖRGÜN

Twining's a-cappella quartet, the Crosstown Ensemble, the SPIT Orchestra, and the Bang on a Can All-Stars. At 2:30: George Antheil's "Ballet Mécanique" (which became a cause célèbre when it was unveiled, in Paris, in 1924), as well as works by Alvin Curran, Henry Threadgill, and others. . . . ¶ At 5: Music by John Luther Adams, Julia Wolfe, Kitty Brazelton, and Daniel Goode (his thirty-five-minute "Tunnel Funnel"), among others. . . . ¶ At 7: A program that includes Michael Gordon's "Lillies," Toby Twining's "Richi Richi Rubel & Shaman," and David Lang's "Cheating, Lying, Stealing." . . . ¶ At 9: Phil Kline's "Whole Lotta Love," Frederic Rzewski's "Piano Piece #4," and Steve Reich's "Drumming." (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. One ticket provides entry and reëntry all day.)

Artemis Chamber Ensemble—Flutist Sue Lund, cellist Anna Choliakin, and pianist Christine Diwyk offer solo and chamber works by Chopin, Scarlatti, Copland, and Cécile Chaminade. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 346 W. 20th St. June 2 at 4. Tickets at the door.)

Salon Soirées—Violist Rebecca Young, cellist Maria Kitsopoulos, and pianist Ilan Rechtman perform duos and trios by Beethoven and Brahms, in a second-floor music room. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. June 2 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Makiko Hirata—Pianist, performing selections from Schubert's Impromptus and Debussy's Études. (Mansfield Hotel, 12 W. 44th St. June 3 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Marc-André Hamelin—The Polish pianist Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938) was such a technical wizard that an exasperated Arthur Rubinstein once complained, "It would take me five hundred years to get that kind of mechanism." Among Godowsky's strong suits, the independence of his fingers was the trump: each one seemed to possess its own miniature brain, and none of them liked to rest. Godowsky would put idle fingers to use by interpolating extra contrapuntal lines into established pieces, a liberty some listeners viewed as a sacrilege; others marvelled at his alluring combination of virtuosity and wit. Among the masterworks that Godowsky found insufficiently challenging were Chopin's legendarily difficult Études; he eventually produced fifty-three arrangements from them (twenty-two for the left hand alone), which the brilliant student Heinrich Neuhaus later declared to be "absolutely transcendental in their difficulty." Charles Valentin Alkan (1813-88) was one of the few earlier composers whose works approach Godowsky's in dense, finger-twisting difficulty. Few pianists have the nerve to attempt the music of either one onstage, but Mr. Hamelin, an ultra-virtuoso, offers pieces by both in this recital. In addition to several of Godowsky's Chopin transcriptions and Alkan's Concerto for Solo Piano (Op. 39, Nos. 8-10), he'll perform Busoni's transcription of Bach's D-Major Prelude and Fugue—which is only slightly less difficult. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. June 4 at 8.)

North/South Consonance—The ensemble performs de Falla's "Siete Canciones Populares Españolas" (with soprano Eva de la O) and his Concerto for Harpsichord and Five Instruments (featuring the group's director, Max Lifchitz). Completing the program are works by David Ward-Steinman, Bernard Allen Schulz, Claudio Gervasoni, Angel Olmeda, and Joel Thome (who will double as conductor in "Para Manuel," his recently composed homage to de Falla). (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. June 4 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Jubal Trio—Soprano Christine Schadeberg, flutist Sue Ann Kahn, and harpist Susan Jolles perform music by Copland, Peter Schickele, and Susan Botti, among others. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 229-5896. June 4 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Nothing But Net—City anglers may want to head to Brooklyn this weekend, where biologist Peter Warny will be casting his nets into the waters of Prospect Park for an educational catch-and-release study. His harvest should include golden shiners, Asian clams, sunfish, and bullfrogs—and participants will be encouraged to handle and examine them all. Warny won't rule out surprises, either; there are snapping turtles lurking in the Brooklyn deep, as well as exotic pet-store varieties, cast off, he suggests, by owners who found them too big to flush. (June 2 at 1. For more information, call 1-718 788-8549.)

'Vette-Setters—Members of the New York City Corvette Club will park in and around South Street Seaport, at Beekman and South Streets, for an afternoon of auto admiration. (June 2, from noon to 3. For information about the least potholed routes to the event, call 964-8465.)

On the Waterfront—Historian John Kriskiewicz slips into Red Hook, the latest unlikely location for a community of artists. The former marshland, which in the eighteen-fifties became the center of the city's shipping industry, now houses a public pool so large that lifeguards have been known to patrol it on rafts; on Saturdays and Sundays, the soccer field across the street is lined with an ad-hoc marketplace of sidewalk stands serving tamales, gorditas, sopes, and huaraches to a mainly Mexican clientele that knows from *picante*. (June 1 at 11 A.M. For more information, call the Brooklyn Historical Society at 1-718 624-0890.)

House of Dreams—Iranian-born architects Gisue and Mojgan Hariri discuss their slyly minimal projects, both real (a meditatively modern New York penthouse) and imagined (a radiant and tactile lighthouse devised for the blind). (Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Ave., at 51st St. For reservations, call 935-3592. June 4 at 6.)

Readings—May 29 at 8: Ashley Warlick reads from her first novel, "The Distance from the Heart of Things," and Robert Olmstead reads from his memoir, "Stay Here with Me." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ May 30 at 6:30: Antonina Bouis reads from her translation of Anatoly Rybakov's "Dust & Ashes," and Edith Grossman reads from her translation of Mario Vargas Llosa's "Death in the Andes." (Logos Bookstore, York Ave. near 83rd St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ May 31 at 7:30: Poets Lucie Brock-Broido ("The Master Letters") and Richard Kenney ("The Invention of the Zero") read from their work. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ June 3 at 7:30: A. S. Byatt reads from her latest novel, "Babel Tower." (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—June 1 at noon: Urban gardener Ken Druse promotes fenestral horticulture by showing what to plant in a window box and how to do so. (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ June 1 at 1: At their annual rendezvous, the Professional Archaeologists of New York City (PANYC) take up the topic of immigrant life in the Five Points area, the onetime turf of such Irish gangs as the Roach Guards and the Plug Uglies. (Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. No charge beyond museum admission.) . . . ¶ June 3 at 5:30: Choreographer Neta Pulvermacher talks about growing up on a kibbutz, after which she performs segments of her "matzo solo" and "Five Beds/ Children of the Dream," her dance memoir of communal childhood on kibbutz Lehavot-Habashan, in Upper Galilee. (Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center. 870-1630.)

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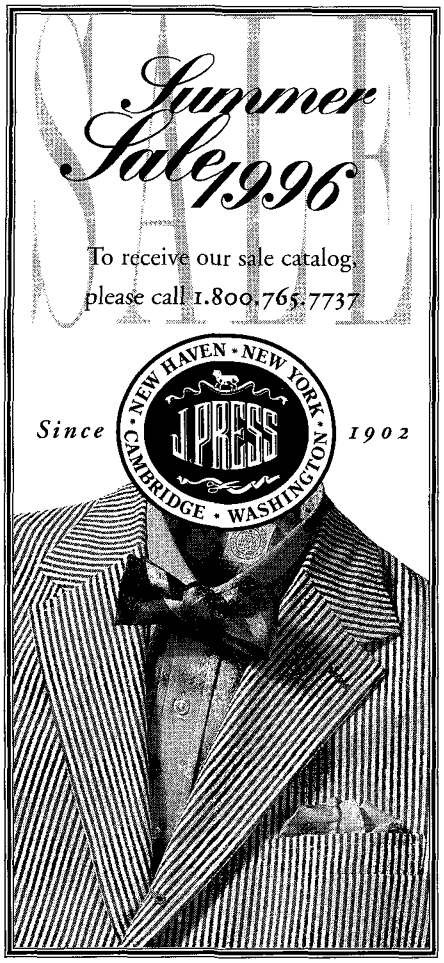
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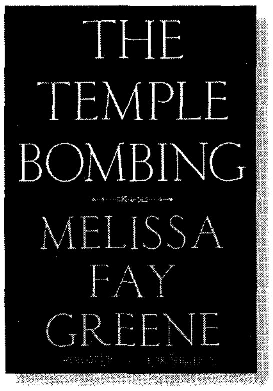
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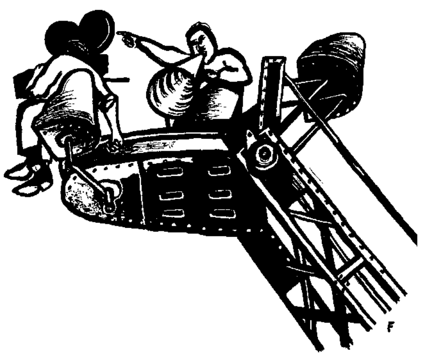
THE MOVIES



FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

The Arrival—Charlie Sheen stars as a NASA astronomer caught between a government conspiracy and an alien invasion, in a thriller written and directed by David Twohy. With Ron Silver, Richard Schiff, and Lindsay Crouse. Opening May 31. (84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Dragonheart—A tenth-century knight (Dennis Quaid) and his fire-breathing sidekick (whose voice is provided by Sean Connery) fight an evil king (David Thewlis), in an adventure directed by Rob Cohen. Screenplay by Charles Edward Pogue. Opening May 31. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th St. East, and Ziegfeld.)

Eddie—A comedy directed by Steve Rash, in which Whoopi Goldberg plays a limousine driver who becomes the coach of the New York Knicks. With Frank Langella. Opening May 31. (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, 84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 2, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 26.)

Antonia's Line—A Dutch feminist fairy tale about an eccentric single mother (the impressive Willeke van Ammelrooy) who sets up housekeeping on a farm after the Second World War and takes all kinds of strays—from a retarded rape victim to a depressive, Schopenhauer-saturated intellectual—under her wing. The movie could be a crowd pleaser at art houses, but what it's packaging is little more than self-regard: Antonia and her clan are righteous, and anyone who gets in their way is a pig. Written and directed by Marleen Gorris. In Dutch.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Cinema 3.)

The Birdcage—Mike Nichols's remake of "La Cage aux Folles" (1978) largely contents itself with decking out what appears to be a profoundly, unalterably French farce in American drag; the cautious, sensible approach taken by Nichols and his screenwriter, Elaine May, has the drawback of making this movie feel a little, as the French might say, de trop. Although Robin Williams and Nathan Lane, as the bickering middle-aged lovers originally played by Ugo Tognazzi and Michel Serrault, are skillful, the script doesn't give them much opportunity to distinguish themselves from their memorable predecessors. Oddly, the funniest performer here is Gene Hackman, playing an aggressively straight, family-values-spouting politician. Also with Dianne Wiest.—T.R. (3/18/96) (Baronet, Coronet, Criterion Center, 62nd and Broadway, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Village East Cinemas. . . . ¶ 34th St. East; through May 30.)

Cold Comfort Farm—John Schlesinger's eccentric rural comedy is based on a 1932 novel by Stella Gibbons. The bright, sophisticated young heroine, Flora Poste (Kate Beckinsale), goes to live with obscure relatives in Sussex, and, appalled by their ignorance and their dour inertia, sets out to change their stubborn ways; she's Jeeves in skirts, subverting the blind workings of Fate to her own ends. Beckinsale keeps her composure while veteran character actors—Eileen Atkins, Sheila Burrell, Stephen Fry, Freddie Jones, Joanna Lumley, and Ian McKellen—attempt to dazzle her, and us, with their virtuosity. Schlesinger, working from a script by Malcolm Bradbury, maintains a steady rhythm and a light, cheerful mood.—T.R. (5/13/96) (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

The Craft—Andrew Fleming's film, about a coven of attractive teen-age witches and their abuse of power, is perfect wish-fulfillment entertainment for the mall. While the schizophrenic screenplay, by the director and Peter Filardi—half teen comedy, half supernatural thriller—doesn't quite gel, a grab bag of terrific alternative rock helps it over the rough spots. The movie's principal asset, however, is Fairuza Balk, who, with her mad mascaraed eyes and creepy line readings, casts a freaky showstopper of a spell.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, and Orpheum VII.)

Dead Man Walking—Tim Robbins's blunt, powerful movie tells the story of a murderer (Sean Penn) awaiting execution and a nun (Susan Sarandon) trying to save his soul—and, if possible, his skin. The filmmaker clearly hopes that familiarity with the grisly realities of capital punishment will finally breed contempt for the idea of premeditated, state-sponsored killing. And although the picture sometimes turns clunky and flat, as if it were sagging under the weight of its good intentions, it winds up being devastatingly effective. Penn has to reveal, within a reckless and apparently despicable character, a salvageable soul, and he makes the erratic rhythm of the condemned man's spiritual progress seem effortless and natural: he captures the languid, insinuating tempo of grace invading a locked-up spirit.—T.R. (1/8/96) (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Worldwide Cinemas.)

Fargo—Everybody in Joel and Ethan Coen's movie talks with painful slowness, as if the icy Minnesota air were freezing their chops; the resulting mood is lugubrious and oddly winning. The story, about a hopeless businessman (William H. Macy) who hires a couple of crooks (Peter Stormare and Steve Buscemi) to kidnap his wife, offers the usual Coen compound of random daftness and concentrated violence. Frances McDormand has a high old time as the police chief of the town of Brainerd; decent and unhurried (her character is seven months pregnant), she brings order to the weirdness and warms it up.—A.L. (3/25/96) (Art Greenwich Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

Flipper—Elijah Wood joins Paul Hogan and that dolphin in a family film directed by Alan Shapiro. With Isaac Hayes. (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, National Twin, Olympia, Orpheum VII, Regency, and Waverly.)

Flirting with Disaster—David O. Russell's farcical road movie sets a thirtyish New Yorker (Ben Stiller), adopted as a small child, on a cross-country search for his biological parents, accompanied by his wife (Patricia Arquette) and an adoption-agency official (Téa Leoni). Despite some expert performances—by George Segal and Mary Tyler Moore as the adoptive parents (nervous urban kvetches), and Alan Alda and Lily Tomlin as the biological ones (devious ex-hippies)—the picture remains as confused as its hero; unlike him, it never does find its identity.—T.R. (4/15/96) (86th Street East Twin, Guild, Lincoln Square, 68th St. Playhouse, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Village East Cinemas.)

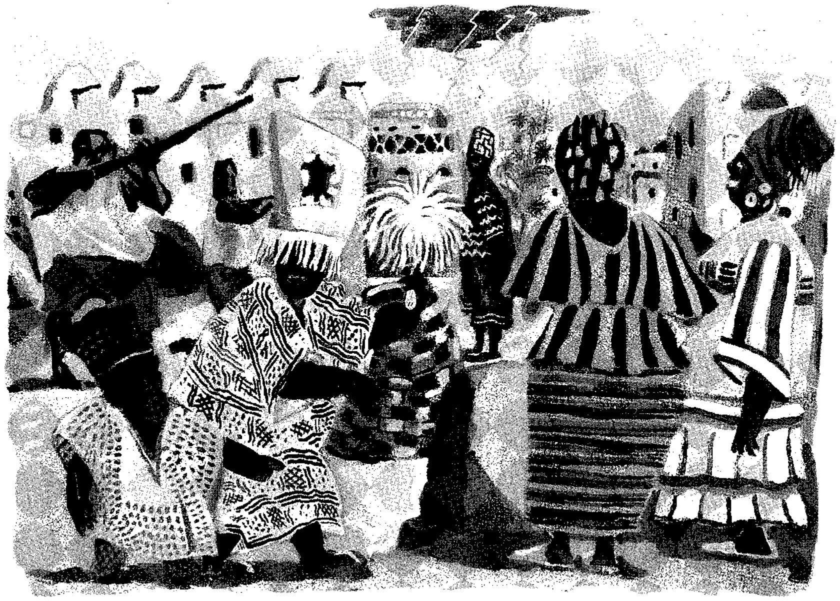
The Flower of My Secret—Leo (Marisa Paredes), who is struggling through a wretched marriage, longs to be taken seriously as a novelist but has been churning out schlock romances for years, with horrible success, under a pseudonym. Her efforts to strip the dead wood from her life and discover what's left alive include flirting with a literary editor (the Chaucerian Juan Echanove) and making peace with her family. (Chus Lampreave and Rossy De Palma form a great pair as, respectively, Leo's mother and sister.) Pedro Almodóvar's script is, as usual, ripe to bursting, but his latest movie is gracious, affecting, and frenzy-free. In Spanish.—A.L. (3/25/96) (Angelika Film Center.)

The Great White Hype—Samuel L. Jackson stars as a boxing promoter who sends a retired fighter (Peter Berg) into the ring against the champion (Damon Wayans), in a comedy directed by Reginald Hudlin. With Jeff Goldblum. (National Twin and 23rd St. West Triplex.)

Guimba: The Tyrant—Writer-director Cheick Oumar Sissoko tells the story of a pre-colonial African despot and his downfall. In Bambara and Peul. (Cinema Village.)

Heaven's Prisoners—Alec Baldwin stars in Phil Joanou's thriller as a former New Orleans cop who returns to crime fighting after he rescues a young girl from a mysterious plane crash. With Kelly Lynch and Mary Stuart Masterson. (Astor Plaza, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Homage—A drama directed by Ross Marks, about a mathematician (Frank Whaley) who stalks a TV star (Sheryl Lee). With Blythe Danner and Bruce Davison. Written by Mark Medoff, from his 1994 play, "The Homage That Follows." (Cinema II and Village East Cinemas.)



At Cinema Village, Cheick Oumar Sissoko's "Guimba: The Tyrant."

RUSSELL CHRISTIAN

The Horseman on the Roof—Jean-Paul Rappeneau's adaptation of Jean Giono's 1951 novel, about a cholera epidemic in nineteenth-century Provence. With Juliette Binoche and Olivier Martinez. Written by the director, Nina Companeez, and Jean-Claude Carrière. In French. (Paris.)

I Shot Andy Warhol—The story of Valerie Solanas (Lili Taylor), the deranged woman who, in 1968, ambushed Warhol at the Factory and nearly killed him. The director, Mary Harron, tries to depict Solanas as a complex, tragicomic figure, but the protagonist can't bear the weight that the film puts on her, and Taylor's monotonous performance doesn't do much to lighten the load. The languid-hysterical Factory atmosphere feels accurate, though, and so does Jared Harris's witty portrayal of Warhol. Also with Stephen Dorff (as Candy Darling), Michael Imperioli (Ondine), and Donovan Leitch (Gerard Malanga).—T.R. (5/13/96) (Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sutton.)

James and the Giant Peach—Adapted from Roald Dahl's surreal adventure story, Henry Selick's short, spiky movie is pretty adventurous itself. James (Paul Terry), a young orphan, flees his loathsome aunts (Miriam Margolyes and Joanna Lumley) inside a magic peach that takes him and a posse of insect friends to an improbably benign New York. The film opens and closes on live action, with rubbery stop-motion animation in between. Like the peach, it offers a bumpy ride, but Selick's feeling for texture—for the climates of bliss and apprehension—is so sure that you gradually come to relish the oddity of the whole enterprise.—A.L. (4/22/96) (86th Street East Twin.)

Jane Eyre—Franco Zeffirelli's adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's novel is more sedate than you might expect. The reason to see it is Charlotte Gainsbourg, who plays Jane with just the right combination of ethereality and guts. William Hurt makes a rather delicate but acceptable Rochester. With Anna Paquin as the young Jane, and Joan Plowright as Rochester's housekeeper, Mrs. Fairfax.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse. . . . ¶ Ziegfeld; through May 30.)

The Man by the Shore—An unusually powerful heartbreaker, set in Haiti in the early nineteen-sixties and told from the point of view of an eight-year-old. The leisurely opening sequence, in which Sarah (Jennifer Zubar), singing and playing in her grandmother's attic, sees a man out in the street being tortured, seems to promise something impressionistic and elliptical. But an artful layering of flashbacks starts to lay out a story. Two years earlier, Sarah's father, a captain in the military police, caves in and betrays a friend to the Tontons Macoutes; soon after this lapse, he is edged out of his post by a brutish new boss and forced to flee the country, and now Sarah lives in hiding. The movie is about as fresh, as humane, and—with a few exceptions—as subtle as political allegory can get. Along the way it turns into a thriller as well, the suspense building as to whether Sarah's grandmother will be able to get the girl and her sisters out of the country. The cinematography, by Armand Marco, is strong, and so is Zubar: emotionally she's utterly pure, which makes Sarah much less predictable than the world-weary adults around her. Written and directed by Raoul Peck. In French and Creole.—S.K. (Quad Cinema.)

Ma Saison Préférée—André Téchiné's latest drama is a love story of a peculiar and thwarted kind: the central couple is a sister and brother in middle age. Émilie (Catherine Deneuve) and Antoine (Daniel Auteuil) bicker and snap and block each other out with the constancy of twin souls; when their mother takes ill, everything comes to a head, and the movie treads delicately along the borders of incest. What mars the picture is the high-flown talk that trickles on when none is required; the characters, like many of their predecessors in French cinema, spend much of the time speaking as if they've recently escaped from a maximum-security novel. In French.—A.L. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

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Mission: Impossible—Tom Cruise stars in Brian De Palma's thriller, based on the television series that ran from 1966 to 1973. Screenplay by David Koepp and Robert Towne. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Monster—Roberto Benigni plays a con man mistaken for a serial killer, in a comedy he co-wrote (with Vincenzo Cerami) and directed. In Italian. (Angelika 57 and Cinema 3rd Avenue.)

Nelly and Monsieur Arnaud—The latest demonstration of Parisian decorum from the French director Claude Sautet. Nelly (Emmanuelle Béart) leaves her marriage and goes to work for Arnaud (Michel Serrault), a former judge who is writing his memoirs. The two tiptoe toward love, then pull back. The movie is played (as you would expect) with watchful finesse, particularly by the morose and sardonic Serrault, but you sometimes long for a little wildness; Béart's character should be driving men crazy, but what does she do? She *interests* them. In French.—A.L. (4/22/96) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Original Gangstas—Getting a group of seventies blaxploitation stars back together sounds like a smart idea, but the plot—former gang members reunite to clean up their hometown streets—reeks of civic-mindedness. While "Shaft" and "Super Fly" and their ilk traded heavily in stereotypes, their humor and energy made them entertainingly empowering. This new movie, with its sluggish swagger and its soapbox pontificating, undermines whatever rebelliousness the stars (Richard Roundtree, Jim Brown, and Fred Williamson) may once have had. Only Pam Grier maintains her coffee-colored glow: her anger builds momentum and gives the audience a glimpse not of what might have been, but of what was.—B.D. (Embassy 3.)

The Pallbearer—David Schwimmer plays a slacker who still lives with his mother and hangs around with buddies from high school; through a contrived mixup he's mistaken for the friend of a high-school classmate who committed suicide, and he winds up sleeping with both the suicide's mother (Barbara Hershey) and the wholesome girl (Gwyneth Paltrow) he's had a crush on all his life. Schwimmer's comic timing is good, but he runs low on sex appeal, and he undercuts the intended satire by tugging too hard at the audience's heartstrings. Directed by Matthew Reeves.—S.K. (Park & 86th Street Cinemas. . . . ¶ Cinema I; through May 30.)

The Postman—Antonio Skármeta's bittersweet 1985 novel, "Burning Patience," on which this movie is loosely based, told the story of Mario, a lonely postman who delivers mail to Pablo Neruda on Isla Negra, the corner of Chile where the poet spent much of his later life. In Michael Radford's lovely but sanitized version, the action has been moved to picturesque Italy. As Neruda, the great Philippe Noiret somehow conquers being dubbed in Spanish-accented Italian; as Mario, the late Italian comedian Massimo Troisi is painfully affecting. In Italian.—S.K. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

Primal Fear—In Gregory Hoblit's conventional but enjoyable courtroom drama, Richard Gere plays an attorney defending a young man accused of killing the Archbishop of Chicago. The story is full of tired characters (a prosecutor who's an old flame, a corrupt city developer), yet Frances McDormand, Laura Linney, John Mahoney, and Andre Braugher are all so casually skillful that Gere's c'mon-you-know-you-want-me style has the room it needs to play. But it's Edward Norton, as the Boo Radley-like defendant, who steals the movie. Hoblit has an economical style, and he gets the job done with very little fuss.—B.D. (East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Waverly. . . . ¶ Embassy 2; through May 30.)

Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.—In which a policeman (Rick Gianasi) turns into an Asian-style superhero. Directed by Lloyd Kaufman and Michael Herz, from a story by Kaufman. (Film Forum; through June 4.)

Someone Else's America—Goran Paskaljević's comedy, about a family of illegal aliens from Montenegro living in Brooklyn. With Tom Conti and Miki Manojlović. Written by Gordan Mihić. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Spy Hard—Former agent Dick Steele (Leslie Nielsen) returns from retirement to hunt down and destroy the mad General Rancor (Andy Griffith), in a spoof directed by Rick Friedberg. With Nicollette Sheridan. (86th Street East Twin, Embassy 1, Gotham Cinema, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Truth About Cats and Dogs—Janeane Garofalo plays a radio veterinarian; one day a caller (Ben Chaplin) asks her out, but she feels insecure, so she gets her beautiful neighbor (Uma Thurman) to impersonate her and tags along pretending to be a friend. Garofalo has a certain barbed charm, but it's put to shallow use here, while Thurman is condemned to play yet another male trophy, a fantasy girl who scrunches her nose when she laughs and walks like a newborn fawn. Directed by Michael Lehmann.—S.K. (Art Greenwich Twin, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

Twister—Another hectic thriller from Jan De Bont, who had a runaway hit with "Speed." The new movie is, if possible, even more content-free; in its childish excitement, it rather sweetly forgets to offer up a plot. All we get is a bunch of terrifying tornadoes, pursued with glee by a married pair of professional storm chasers, Bill (Bill Paxton) and Jo (Helen Hunt). These two are supposed to be getting a divorce, but, like the heroically bickering couple in "The Abyss," they're forced back together by the pressure of danger. You don't really care what happens to them, though, or to the unfortunate Melissa (Jami Gertz), who aims to take Jo's place—you're too busy having your mind blown by the houses, cars, and cows tumbling across the skies. If you sit down and think quietly about the picture afterward, none of it makes much sense, of course, but while you're watching it you don't think at all. You duck.—A.L. (5/20/96) (Criterion Center, Gemini, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village East Cinemas.)

Two Deaths—As revolution rages in the streets, a dinner attended by four former schoolmates turns into a night of revelations. With Michael Gambon and Sonia Braga. Directed by Nicolas Roeg. (Quad Cinema.)

Wallace and Gromit: The Best of Aardman Animation—This seventy-seven-minute retrospective of work from the British studio is probably the most fun in town. The Aardman artists employ plasticine models in stop-motion; there is something deadpan, even mournful, in their bendiness. The highlight is three shorts by three-time Oscar winner Nick Park. Brief, bright, unpretentious, and graced with the kind of immaculate gags that we associate with the slapstick of the nineteen-twenties, Park's movies have a style that you can recognize within half a second; can any of today's other filmmakers claim as much?—A.L. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Welcome to the Dollhouse—Todd Solondz's low-budget independent movie, which won the Grand Jury Prize at the most recent Sundance Film Festival, pitilessly chronicles the indignities visited on an unpopular seventh grader by her vicious classmates and her grotesque family. The picture wallows in the details of her daily persecution without ever quite settling on a coherent attitude toward it. Solondz wobbles between glib poignance and scabrous comedy until, finally, his urge to avenge the humiliations of his own New Jersey childhood seems to get the better of him. As the film grinds on, it grows steadily nastier and more hysterical: in one scene near the end, the filmmaker actually ridicules a mother's grief at the kidnapping of her youngest child. It's a hateful movie.—T.R. (5/27/96) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN 2: Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **ANGELS & INSECTS** (reviewed in our issue of 1/29/96): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **ASHES OF TIME:** Cinema Village. . . . **A BOY CALLED HATE:** Embassy 4. . . . **BROKEN ARROW** (2/19/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **BUTTERFLY KISS:** Angelika 57. . . . **CASINO** (12/4/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **CITY HALL** (2/19/96): Manhattan Twin. . . . **COLD FEVER:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **DEAD MAN:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **DIABOLIQUE** (4/1/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **EXECUTIVE DECISION:** Manhattan Twin. . . . **LEAVING LAS VEGAS** (11/6/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **MIGHTY APHRODITE** (10/30/95): Sutton. . . . **MULHOLLAND FALLS:** First & 62nd Cinemas. . . . **SGT. BILKO** (4/8/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **SUNSET PARK:** Criterion Center. . . . **A THIN LINE BETWEEN LOVE AND HATE:** Criterion Center. . . . **UP CLOSE & PERSONAL** (3/11/96): 59th Street East Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Baronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gemini 1 and 2, Second Ave. at 64th St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

The Asphalt Jungle (1950)—A competent (often overrated) thriller by John Huston about a group of crooks who plan a jewel robbery and how their characters determine the results. Sterling Hayden is the central figure; the cast includes Sam Jaffe, Louis Calhern, Jean Hagen, Marilyn Monroe, and James Whitmore.—P.K. (Symphony Space; June 4.)

Flaming Star (1960)—Elvis Presley, in Man-Tan, as a Texas half-breed whose loyalties are torn when the Kiowas go on the warpath. Don Siegel, this message Western's director, later said that he was bothered by the sight of his ingénue (Barbara Eden) in tailored jeans. The script should have bothered him more: it features grandiose Native American gab (the title refers to "the flaming star of death") and improbable plot devices, like a traumatized man who drags himself through the outdoors for a week yet still is steady enough to pop off Presley's Kiowa mom (Dolores Del Rio). Presley is O.K., if muffled (he sings only two songs, including the theme). Siegel makes the ambushes exciting, but when the characters powwow the movie blows smoke. With John McIntire as Presley's dad and Steve Forrest as his half brother, and L. Q. Jones and Richard Jaeckel. Script by Clair Huffaker and Nunnally Johnson, based on Huffaker's novel.—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; June 1.)

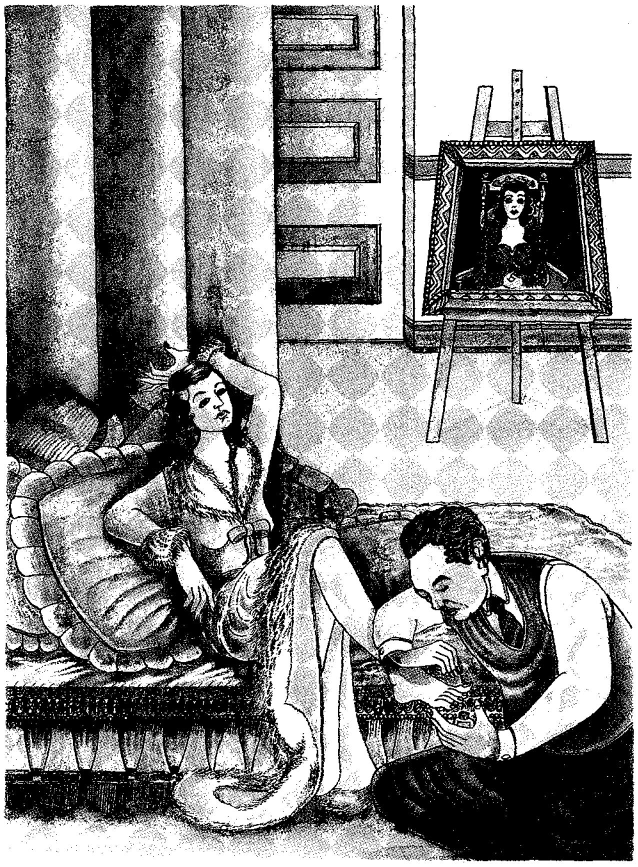
Hollywood Party (1934)—The picture doesn't carry producer or director credits; the entire extravaganza is hit-or-miss casual, as if the brass at M-G-M didn't want to admit having committed themselves to make the thing, and the big M-G-M stars never show up. Instead, you get Jimmy Durante in a Tarzan takeoff and singing a song about reincarnation, as well as Polly Moran as an oil tycoon's wife, and June Clyde, Jack Pearl, and Lupe Velez, who join Laurel and Hardy in an egg-breaking routine. Some fairly funny moments, and a pleasant score.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; May 29-30.)

A Man and a Woman (1966)—Probably the most efficacious make-out movie of the swinging sixties. The young cinematographer-director Claude Lelouch conveys tender love by cutting to gamboling lovers among gamboling horses and then lambs and then dogs. The actors don't have to do anything because the camera—shooting through rain and snow and ice and into sunsets—supplies the moods for them. Anouk Aimée is blankly mysterious and glamorous; Jean-Louis Trintignant and Pierre Barouh are like a teen-age girl's dream boyfriends—daredevils to the world but gentle and sweet with her. In French.—P.K. (Florence Gould Hall; June 4.)

Night Moves (1975)—Gene Hackman plays an unhappily married ex-jock private eye who, like Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, plays chess. That's their only similarity. Marlowe buttoned up his emotions because he was too sensitive; this lug is simply insensitive. His search for an L.A. runaway (Melanie Griffith) leads him into the Florida underworld in a plot that provides murk rather than mystery. With Susan Clark as his wife, Harris Yulin as her lover, John Crawford as Griffith's stepfather, and Jennifer Warren as Crawford's mistress—a grating impersonation of a liberated woman. Alan Sharp wrote the script. Arthur Penn directed, weakly; even his violence turns soggy and didactic.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; June 3-4.)

North by Northwest (1959)—One of Alfred Hitchcock's most entertaining American thrillers. It goes on too long, and the script seems shaped to accommodate various set pieces. But it has a classic sequence, in which a crop-dusting plane tries to dust the hero (Cary Grant), and a genial, sophisticated, comic tone. Just about everybody in it is a spy or a government agent (except Grant, who is mistaken for one). His performance is very smooth and appealing, and he looks so fit that he gets by with having Jessie Royce Landis, who was born the same year he was, playing his mother. The heroine is Eva Marie Saint; a perverse makeup artist has turned her face into an albino African mask. With James Mason, Leo G. Carroll, and Martin Landau as the blue-eyed menace Leonard. The music is by Bernard Herrmann.—P.K. (American Museum of the Moving Image; June 2.)

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (1964)—A restored print of Jacques Demy's stylized, unabashedly emotional story of lost love, in which all the dialogue is sung. Catherine Deneuve plays a restless provincial girl who rebels against her overprotective widowed mother (Anne Vernon) by stepping out with a handsome auto mechanic (Nino Castelnuovo). The movie's reputation as a sentimental crowd-pleasing novelty item seems as grossly unjust as the condescension that Deneuve's acting used to receive; it's as if both the movie and its star were being punished for the miraculous simplicity—the sheer obviousness—of their beauty. In French.—T.R. (4/15/96) (Film Forum.)



At the American Museum of the Moving Image, Joan Bennett and Edward G. Robinson in "Scarlet Street."

BENOÎT DUQUETTE

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**Theatre 2:** May 29-30: "Going Hollywood" (1933, Raoul Walsh) and "Hollywood Party" (†). . . . May 30 (evening only): "Follow Thru" (1930, Laurence Schwab and Lloyd Corrigan) and "The Vagabond King" (1930, Ludwig Berger). . . . ¶ Films made in Hollywood between 1969 and 1975. May 31-June 2: "Five Easy Pieces" (1970, Bob Rafelson). . . . June 3-4: "Alice's Restaurant" (1969, Arthur Penn) and "Night Moves" (†). . . . **Theatre 3:** "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" (†).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Films directed by Don Siegel. May 30 at 2:30 and June 1 at 5: "An Annapolis Story" (1955). . . . May 30 at 6 and June 2 at 5: "The Black Windmill" (1974). . . . May 30 at 8 and June 2 at 2: "Telefon" (1977). . . . May 31 at 2:30: "Count the Hours" (1953). . . . May 31 at 6: "Jinxed!" (1982). . . . May 31 at 8 and June 3 at 2:30: "Rough Cut" (1980). . . . June 1 at 2: "Flaming Star" (†). . . . June 3 at 6: "Star in the Night" (1945) and "Hitler Lives?" (1946). . . . June 4 at 2:30: "Baby Face Nelson" (1957). . . . June 4 at 6: "Hound Dog Man" (1959). . . . ¶ May 30 at 3 and 6: "A Little Vicious" (1991, Immy Humes) and "Lizzie Borden: Hash & Rehash" (1995, Humes). . . . ¶ May 31 at 3: Animated films, 1900-21. . . . ¶ May 31 at 6: "Shirley Clarke in Our Time" (1993, Donna Cameron). . . . ¶ May 31 at 8: "The Quiet One" (1949, Sidney Meyers). . . . ¶ June 1 at 2:30: "Satyajit Ray—Introspections" (1990, K. Bikram Singh). . . . ¶ June 1 at 5: "George Grosz in America" (1993, Norbert Bunge and Christine Fischer Defoy). . . . ¶ June 2 at 2:30 and June 3 at 6: "Lilliana Porter: Fragments of the Journey" (1993, Juan Mandelbaum), "Leonardo's Deluge" (1989, Mark Whitney), and "Jan Groover: Tilting at Space" (1994, Mark Trottenberg). . . . ¶ June 2 at 5: "Harry Callahan" (1993, Judith Wechsler), "Jazz Dance" (1954, Roger Tilton and Richard Leacock), and "Welcome to the Water Planet" (1990, Seth Schneiderman and Maryte Kavaliauskas). . . . ¶ June 3 at 3: "Slow Moves" (1983, Jon Jost). . . . ¶ June 4 at 3: "The Black Box" (1992, Tamar Trampe and John Feindt).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—May 29 at 2, 4, 6, and 8; May 30 at 2, 4, and 6; May 31 at 4 and 8; and June 1-2 at 4, 6, and 8: "Carpati: 50 Miles, 50 Years" (1995, Yael Strom). . . . May 31 at 2, 6, and 10: "Latcho Drom" (1995, Tony Gatlif). . . . June 1-2 at 2: "Court Jester" (1956, Norman Panama). . . . June 3 at 2 and 6:15: "Overture to Glory" (1939, Max Nosseck). . . . June 3 at 4 and 8:15: "David and Bathsheba" (1951, Henry King). . . . June 4 at 2: "The Jazz Singer" (1927, Alan Crosland). . . . June 4 at 4:15: "The Distant Journey" (1948, Alfred Radok).

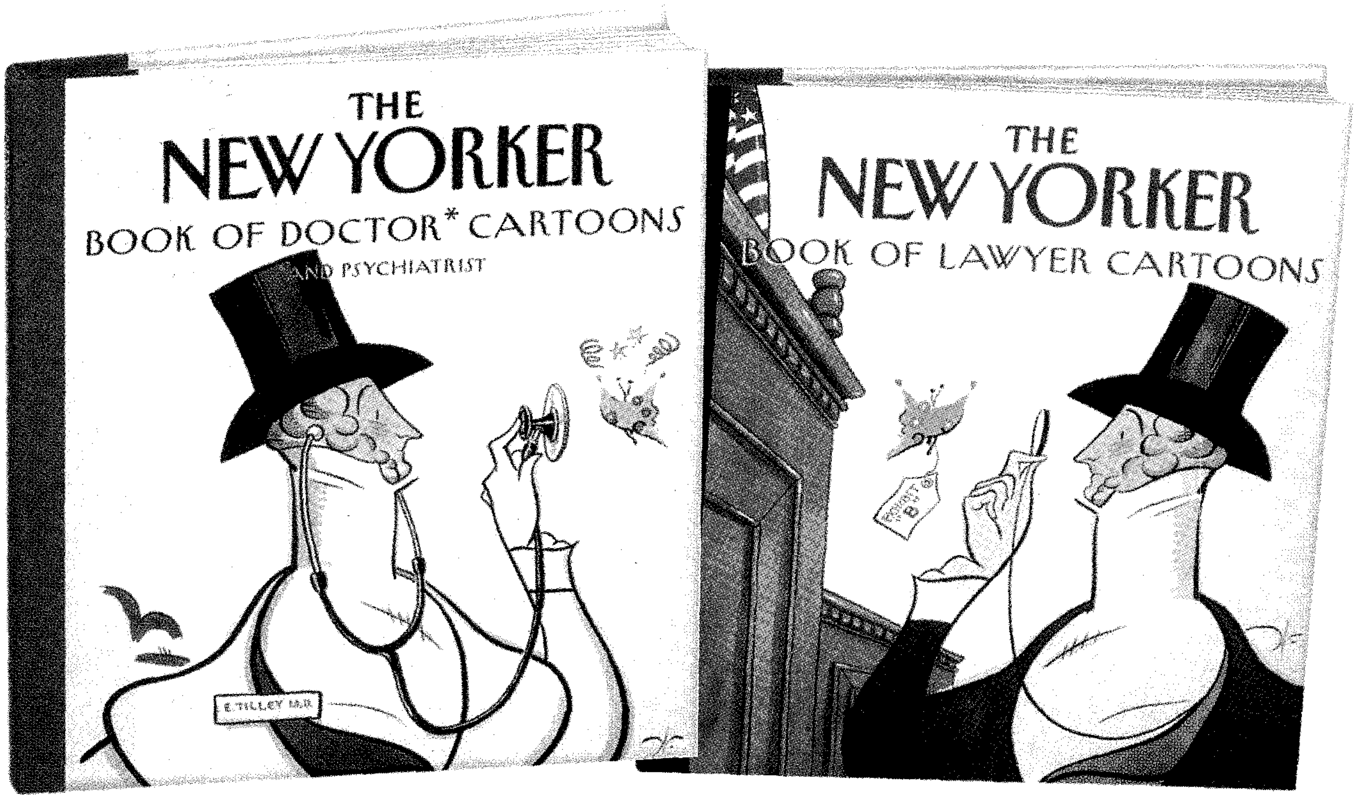
A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films. On June 2 at 7, the feature will be "The Killing of Sister George" (1968, Robert Aldrich).

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—June 4 at 7: "The Asphalt Jungle" (†). . . . June 4 at 9:15: "Frantic" (1957, Louis Malle; in French), with Jeanne Moreau.

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—June 4 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: "A Man and a Woman" (†).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—Films made in Hollywood by Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang. June 1 at 2: "Scarlet Street" (1945, Lang). . . . June 1 at 4: "Strangers on a Train" (1951, Hitchcock). . . . June 2 at 2: "You Only Live Once" (1937, Lang). . . . June 2 at 4: "North by Northwest" (†).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—May 31 at 8: "Intolerance" (1916, D. W. Griffith; silent). . . . June 1 at 9: A hundred and thirty short films by Louis and August Lumière. . . . June 2 at 4: One film each by Lithuanian filmmakers Vytas Landsbergis and Arunas Matelis. . . . June 2 at 6: Films by Georges Méliès.



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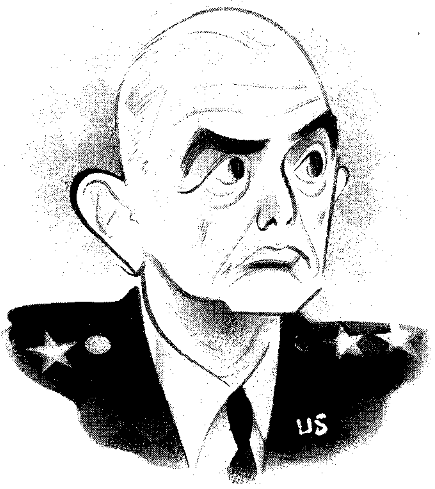
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

A DOVE FIGHTS THE DRUG WAR

General Barry McCaffrey is a man immersed in the drug culture. Since his appointment by President Clinton as the director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy—the "drug czar"—McCaffrey has been going around the country with a message that is decidedly at odds with the tough talk of the current campaign season. A retired four-star general who led forces in Vietnam and in Operation Desert Storm, McCaffrey believes that Americans should abandon the notion of a drug war. "The metaphor of the war on drugs isn't wrong so much as inadequate," he explained. "We're not trying to achieve total victory, it's not a campaign, and these people aren't the enemy." Lately, he has been making the rounds of treatment facilities across the country to spend time with the people his office most directly affects: drug addicts. This tour of duty recently brought him to a branch of Phoenix House in Long Island City, where, on a rainy afternoon, six recovering addicts gathered to tell him why "treatment works," as Mitchell Rosenthal, the president of Phoenix House, likes to say, and, indirectly, to make a case for government funding of drug-treatment programs.

McCaffrey, a gray-haired man of fifty-three whose face is chiselled into a permanent battle scowl, arrived at the facility precisely when he said he would. The residents took turns describing how drugs had torn their lives to bits. Debbie, a thirty-one-year-old whose closely cropped hair, Doc Martens, and tangles of earrings were faintly resonant of her former life on the Lower East Side, told how heroin addiction had put her on the streets. A recovering addict named Wendell flatly told the general that "sniffin' coke with liquor is pretty good," but added that sustaining himself on drug cocktails was like "living in a tornado." When a former crack addict named Charlene tried to tell the General about finding out she was H.I.V.-positive, she began to cry quietly. The group looked toward McCaffrey, who pursed his lips and crumpled his brow in an understated expression of concern. "Very powerful words," he said a little awkwardly.



General Barry McCaffrey

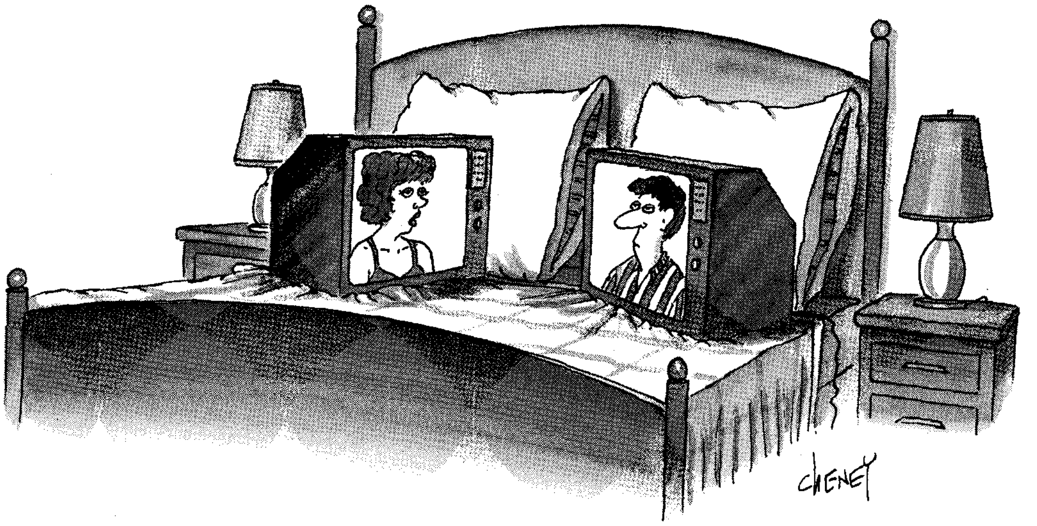
McCaffrey said he first encountered the issue of addiction's grip "in the Army in the seventies, when a third to two-thirds of us in the armed forces were nearly destroyed by drug use." His decision to give up fatigues for discussions of marijuana use and needle-exchange programs is mirrored by the commitment of the Phoenix House residents; they'd traded a crudely survivalist life on the streets for a rigorously ordered one, waking up at six o'clock every morning and making their beds with military corners.

After the round of war stories, the general had a question. Since a twelve-year-old who smokes pot is seventy-nine times more likely to end up with a serious drug problem than one who doesn't, he asked, "What should I think about marijuana? Is it O.K.?" The residents weren't surprised by the question—they'd all smoked marijuana before trying other drugs—but their treatment program had taught them to trace their addictions to something inside themselves, not to a single drug. Asked what that was, a recently admitted heroin addict named Louie told McCaffrey, "I'm still trying to figure it out."

The residents' descriptions of themselves as drug-ravaged wraiths seemed incongruous with their healthy appearance. Wendell, who is more than six feet tall, and who checked into Phoenix House ten months ago at a hundred and twenty pounds, now weighs two-eighty and looks only barely chubby. The General noted "how wonderful you all look" and "how well spoken you are," but added that he wasn't surprised by their poise. "Someone told me, 'There are no stupid people doing drugs.' The kind of people who get into drugs are sort of with it and daring." The comment had the flavor of a morale-boosting compliment to the residents.

After the meeting, they convened over coffee and declared McCaffrey "a regular guy"—in the context, a hearty compliment. And the General had been won over as well. "If you think that the consequences and damage

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC PALMA



"How did we let it get this bad, Melvin?"

• •

from chronic drug addiction are devastating to American society, and you want to do something, you've got to do this," he said, gesturing toward the facility around him. "Does treatment work? Of course it does. Now we've got to make the case to state legislatures and the U.S. Congress."

Then McCaffrey, who keeps his to-the-minute schedule in military time, looked at his watch and said he had to leave. He was heading to Washington, back to the trenches.

BUILT TO LAST

PHILIP JOHNSON, who will turn ninety on July 8th, thinks of himself as a "born-again architect." That's how he described himself the other day, sitting at his corner table in the Four Seasons (the restaurant he designed thirty-seven years ago), picking abstemiously at the baked potato that was his entire lunch. "The terrible thing about becoming ninety is that people think about it," he said. "I do not think about it. I'm much too busy. It's printed everywhere that I've decided when I'm a hundred to quit and go and live in Rome, but I've put that off. I won't be finished building what I am building by then. I'm going at a hundred and six now."

Johnson has projects in various stages of development all over the world—office buildings in New York and Berlin, a twenty-five-hundred-seat gay-and-lesbian church in Dallas, a Catholic chapel in Houston, five sculptural forms on the campus of Case Western Reserve, in Cleveland. What really excites him is the new sculptural architecture that he, Frank Gehry, and Peter Eisenman are pioneering, with computer-designed coördinates and virtually no right angles. The freestanding bronze clock tower he has proposed for Lincoln Center is pure sculpture. The restaurant he had in mind for Donald Trump's hotel and apartment building at Columbus Circle was to be sculptural, but "we're not getting along very well in the Trump field," Johnson says. "I lost the restaurant entirely. They like old-fashioned architecture."

The new, Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, is Johnson's idea of "the greatest building of our time." Johnson had just been over to see it, on a whirlwind six-day architectural tour that took him to Madrid, Santiago, Barcelona, Basel, and Munich, with a final stop in Paris for dinner at Benoît. He travelled with the Gustavo Cisneroses on their private jet. "Always go with the Cisneroses," Johnson said of the Venezuelan media family. "You don't need cash—two Mercedeses to meet us at every stop. Customs taken care of. A little more money than you and I have. I don't have any more money. I wanted to die poor, which is quite easy to do, in case you're aiming at the same thing."

The Museum of Modern Art is mounting a ninetieth-birthday show of works of art donated by Johnson over the years—more than eighty in all, including paintings by Mondrian, Klee, Rauschenberg, Johns, and Warhol. The opening is on June 6th, and there are going to be parties and parties. "I *hate* parties," Johnson said.

Does he have any pronouncements to make?

"Yes, I can do that. Never, never, never stop what you're doing and rest. As my doctor puts it, you'll die. I don't mind dying at all, but I do mind going when I'm still interested in my work. Once in a while, I get a little pooped, but I haven't fallen apart up here yet." (He taps his well-known high forehead, beneath which sit the round, black-rimmed glasses that he designed decades ago because, as he said, "I needed a trademark.") The other day, he fell getting out of bed and broke a rib, but it didn't stop him from jetting off to Europe with the Cisneroses.

Does he have one major regret as an architect?

"That I took too many jobs when there was a big market in the eighties. What was I thinking of? I just wasn't thinking. One of these fevers, like a mania that really gets you. 'You mean I can get two more skyscrapers to build? Let me at 'em.' And there they stand. I don't *acknowledge them.*"

To this perpetual iconoclast, the architectural giants of the century still loom as large as ever. "Corbusier and Mies and Wright—Frank Lloyd Wright may be the greatest. He was so varied, more like Picasso. He didn't get in a rut the way Mies did. See, the trouble with the first-generation moderns was that they had such a battle to get rid of ornament, and building became very boring after a while. My generation was standing on their shoulders, and we should have done better." But just what is Johnson's generation? Is it I. M. Pei and Edward Durell Stone? Or Frank Gehry and Peter Eisenman? "Don't make me think," he snapped. "I don't like to think. I react.

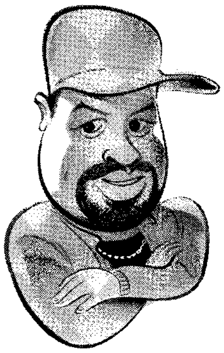
"It's always the future. You never think about the past, but you worry about the future. You're not going to have enough money, your child isn't doing well in school, your wife really is a stinker after all."

What does Johnson worry about?

"Haven't a worry in the world."

COCKTAIL WARS

NOT since Adam was rib to rib with Eve has the battle been so heated. Sightings are pouring in from clubs across the city: homeboys, eyes slitted, leaning against the bar, gripping the necks of champagne bottles and boldly eschewing the time-honored ritual of buying drinks for the admirably evolved ladies around them. "You ain't getting no drink," some of them have been reported to bark. Some sisters have responded by threatening to quit merging with interested young men. A stalemate has been reached. Negotiations are, to put it mildly, tense. It looks as though a long, hot, drinkless, sexless summer lies ahead.


Funkmaster Flex

The controversy dates back a few months, to the night when Funkmaster Flex (a.k.a. Aston Taylor, Jr.), the top radio and club hip-hop d.j. working today, began using his late-night show on WQHT-FM (a.k.a. Hot 97) as a bully pulpit, urging men to quit buying drinks for women. "Dinner and a movie is cool," Flex says. "Then you're getting to know somebody. But in a club she's gonna talk to you while you're buying drinks. The drinks stop, and she'll be, like, 'All right, I'm gonna just walk around for a minute and I'll be right back.' Nah, you walk around all you want, 'cause you're gonna walk around thirsty. You want a drink? Have a drink of water."

Flex, who has skin the color of dark chocolate, a round face, a goatee, and an infectious smile, pauses while mixing records in his booth at Hot 97 and recalls the genesis of his campaign. In the background, Yvette Michelle sings plaintively, "Money is the swee-test hang-o-ver . . . I don' wanna get over." "I was spinning at a club, just watching what goes on at the bar," he says. "I'd never paid attention to it before. I saw one guy with a bottle of Moët. He was kind of chilling by himself. These girls came around him, geesed—that's old school for when you get jerked—his Moët, and left, and he didn't even catch the whole thing. By the time the bottle was empty, no one was around. I said, 'Yo, his Moët got geesed.' So I said, 'You know what, I'm gonna shout that out.' "

Enter Angie Martinez, who's also a popular d.j. at Hot 97 and a breathtakingly cute *mamacita* with a perfect ponytail and the voice of the world's coolest little sister. She ain't having it. "Granted, guys shouldn't *have* to buy drinks," she says, "but girls don't go around harassing guys at the clubs. *We* have to deal with all the nonsense, so they should pay, in some way, for the nonsense." Though Flex and his cohorts claim success, Martinez maintains that the guys are full of it. "It's not working," she says. "They're not gonna be successful at all. Not at all. Flex would be changing the whole mating ritual. He may be powerful, but he's not that powerful. Boys will be boys." Then she says, a bit conspiratorially, "You'll see Flex and those guys at the clubs buying girls drinks."

Angie Martinez

Flex sternly denies Martinez's assertion and vows to press on. But for how long? "It depends on how the ladies handle themselves this year," he decrees. "Some girls have been, like, 'Well, can I buy *you* a drink to show you everyone isn't like that?' But I also got girls that come up to me and say, 'This is my fourth drink. You ain't stopping it.' If they want to come to an agreement, a medium, fine. But I think this is a war I'm gonna ride out."

ART IMITATES LIFE SUPPORT

FOR second-home owners in the Hamptons, this is the season of suspense and trepidation. There's no way of telling what time and nature have wrought over the long winter. Perhaps a dead squirrel in the fireplace, mouse droppings in the linens, some dreaded new species of mold in the fridge.

The Amagansett-based sculptor Donald Lipski has been carrying on in his own curious way during the fallow months. Since November, Lipski has been cooking up plans for "The Cauldron," a loopy installation that fills a large gallery in Southampton's Parrish Art Museum through July 14th. The artist took a couple of charred trees from the forest fire that devastated the pine barrens in Westhampton last summer, mounted them end to end parallel with the floor, and fashioned a giant "root ball" in the middle. Water trickles through the ball into a large stone basin with several lemons bobbing in it.

"Bringing life to something that's dead—that's beyond human powers," says Lipski, a deeply tanned and cheerfully grizzled man in his late forties. "But this is what artists do all the time. I'm taking inanimate things and making them come to life." As if this weren't statement enough, the sculptor has surrounded the trees with machines that caught his eye at an industrial trade fair. A big cylindrical gizmo makes ice using a vacuum process; plastic hoses sluice greenish-yellow oil from a rectangular tank; pink goo falls in sheets from a paint-factory pump. Yards and yards of clear, narrow tubing snake around the walls and among the roots and branches, with a bright-green liquid travelling through at the rate of an intravenous drip.

"The whole thing seems so timely, what with Kevorkian in the news," Lipski says. "Here's a tree on life-support systems." The sculptor claims that the piece, which took him a week to install, "grew organically." Though he doesn't usually set out to make metaphors, he says that "The Cauldron" is "a statement about optimism." The title comes from a hexagram in the I Ching symbolizing fire above and wind and wood below. "You know," Lipski adds, "forest fires are one of nature's great cleansing agents." ♦

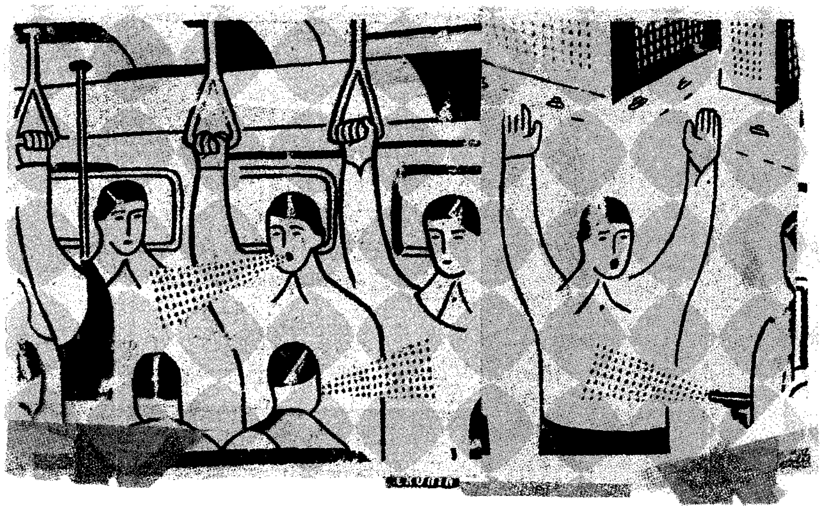
"A Dove Fights the Drug War," Warren St. John; "Built to Last," Dodie Kazanjian; "Cocktail Wars," Touré; "Art Imitates Life Support," Ann Landi.

DEPT. OF DISPUTATION

THE TIPPING POINT

Why is the city suddenly so much safer—could it be that crime really is an epidemic?

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL



Catching violence: one of the hottest ideas in criminal research today.

BRIAN CRONIN

As you drive east on Atlantic Avenue, through the part of New York City that the Police Department refers to as Brooklyn North, the neighborhoods slowly start to empty out: the genteel brownstones of the western part of Brooklyn give way to sprawling housing projects and vacant lots. Bedford-Stuyvesant is followed by Bushwick, then by Brownsville, and, finally, by East New York, home of the Seventy-fifth Precinct, a 5.6-square-mile tract where some of the poorest people in the city live. East New York is not a place of office buildings or parks and banks, just graffiti-covered bodegas and hair salons and auto shops. It is an economically desperate community destined, by most accounts, to get more desperate in the years ahead—which makes what has happened there over the past two and a half years all the more miraculous. In 1993, there were a hundred and twenty-six homicides in the Seven-Five, as the police call it. Last year, there were forty-four. There is probably no other place in the country where violent crime has declined so far, so fast.

Once the symbol of urban violence, New York City is in the midst of a strange and unprecedented transformation. According to the preliminary crime statistics released by the F.B.I. earlier this month, New York has a citywide violent-crime rate that now ranks it a hundred and thirty-sixth among major American cities, on a par with Boise, Idaho. Car thefts have fallen to seventy-one thousand, down from a hundred and fifty thousand as recently as six years ago. Burglaries have fallen from more than two hundred thousand in the early nineteen-eighties to just under seventy-five thousand in 1995. Homicides are now at the level of the early seventies, nearly half of what they were in 1990. Over the past two and a half years, every precinct in the city has recorded double-digit decreases in violent crime. Nowhere, however, have the decreases been sharper than Brooklyn North, in neighborhoods that not long ago were all but written off to drugs and violence. On the streets of the Seven-Five today, it is possible to see signs of everyday life that would have been unthinkable in the early nineties. There are now ordinary people on the streets at dusk—small children riding their bicycles, old people on benches and stoops, people coming out of the subways alone. "There

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was a time when it wasn't uncommon to hear rapid fire, like you would hear somewhere in the jungle in Vietnam," Inspector Edward A. Mezzadri, who commands the Seventy-fifth Precinct, told me. "You would hear that in Bed-Stuy and Brownsville and, particularly, East New York all the time. I don't hear the gunfire anymore. I've been at this job one year and twelve days. The other night when I was going to the garage to get my car, I heard my first volley. That was my first time."

But what accounts for the drop in crime rates? William J. Bratton—who as the New York City Police Commissioner presided over much of the decline from the fall of 1994 until his resignation, this spring—argues that his new policing strategies made the difference: he cites more coördination between divisions of the N.Y.P.D., more accountability from precinct commanders, more arrests for gun possession, more sophisticated computer-aided analysis of crime patterns, more aggressive crime prevention. In the Seven-Five, Mezzadri has a team of officers who go around and break up the groups of young men who congregate on street corners, drinking, getting high, and playing dice—and so remove what was once a frequent source of violent confrontations. He says that he has stepped up random "safety checks" on the streets, looking for drunk drivers or stolen cars. And he says that streamlined internal procedures mean that he can now move against drug-selling sites in a matter of days, where it used to take weeks. "It's aggressive policing," he says. "It's a no-nonsense attitude. Persistence is not just a word, it's a way of life."

All these changes make good sense. But how does breaking up dice games and streamlining bureaucracy cut murder rates by two-thirds? Many criminologists have taken a broader view, arguing that changes in crime reflect fundamental demographic and social trends—for example, the decline and stabilization of the crack trade, the aging of the population, and longer prison sentences, which have kept hard-core offenders off the streets. Yet these trends are neither particularly new nor unique to New York City; they don't account for why the crime rate has dropped so suddenly here and now. Furthermore, whatever good they have done is surely offset, at least in part, by the economic devastation visited on places like Brownsville and East New York in recent years by successive rounds of federal, state, and city social-spending cuts.

It's not that there is any shortage of explanations, then, for what has happened in New York City. It's that there is a puzzling gap between the scale of the demographic and policing changes that are supposed to have affected places like the Seven-Five and, on the other hand, the scale of the decrease in crime there. The size of that gap suggests that violent crime doesn't behave the way we expect it to behave. It suggests that we need a new way of thinking about crime, which is why it may be time to turn to an idea that has begun to attract serious attention in the social sciences: the idea that social problems behave like infectious agents. It may sound odd to talk about the things people do as analogous to the diseases they catch. And yet the idea has all kinds of fascinating implications. What if homicide, which we often casually refer to as an epidemic, actually *is* an epidemic, and moves through populations the way the flu bug does? Would that explain the rise and sudden decline of homicide in Brooklyn North?

WHEN social scientists talk about epidemics, they mean something very specific. Epidemics have their own set of rules. Suppose, for example, that one summer a thousand tourists come to Manhattan from Canada carrying an untreatable strain of twenty-four-hour flu. The virus has a two-percent infection rate, which is to say that one out of every fifty people who come into close contact with someone carrying it catches the bug himself. Let's say that fifty is also exactly the number of people the average Manhattanite—in the course of riding the subways and mingling with colleagues at work—comes into contact with every day. What we have, then, given the recovery rate, is a disease in equilibrium. Every day, each carrier passes on the virus to a new person. And the next day those thousand newly infected people pass on the virus to another thousand people, so that throughout the rest of the summer and the fall the flu chugs along at a steady but unspectacular clip.

But then comes the Christmas season. The subways and buses get more crowded with tourists and shoppers, and instead of running into an even fifty peo-

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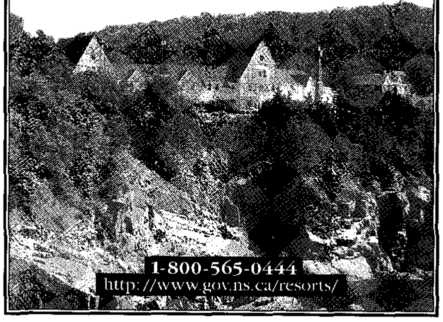

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when the animal had been outgrown. I held her briefly
in my arms, stroked her tail before
we parted, her eyes
nursing the dark moons.

She was never my daughter, and yet
she brought
her own wild light
into the room so that when I opened my eyes
at daybreak
the first thing I saw was snow
spinning small
shoulders in the windows.

The last I saw of her.

—LAURIE KUTCHINS

ple a day, the average Manhattanite now has close contact with, say, fifty-five people a day. That may not sound like much of a difference, but for our flu bug it is critical. All of a sudden, one out of every ten people with the virus will pass it on not just to one new person but to two. The thousand carriers run into fifty-five thousand people now, and at a two-per-cent infection rate that translates into eleven hundred new cases the following day. Some of those eleven hundred will also pass on the virus to more than one person, so that by Day Three there are twelve hundred and ten Manhattanites with the flu and by Day Four thirteen hundred and thirty-one, and by the end of the week there are nearly two thousand, and so on up, the figure getting higher every day, until Manhattan has a full-blown flu epidemic on its hands by Christmas Day.

In the language of epidemiologists, fifty is the "tipping point" in this epidemic, the point at which an ordinary and stable phenomenon—a low-level flu outbreak—can turn into a public-health crisis. Every epidemic has its tipping point, and to fight an epidemic you need to understand what that point is. Take AIDS, for example. Since the late eighties, the number of people in the United States who die of AIDS every year has been steady at forty thousand, which is exactly the same as the number of people who are estimated to become infected with H.I.V. every year. In other words, AIDS is in the same self-perpetuating phase that our Canadian flu was in, early on; on the average, each person who dies of AIDS infects, in the course of his or her lifetime, one new person.

That puts us at a critical juncture. If the number of new infections increases just a bit—if the average H.I.V. carrier passes on the virus to slightly more than one person—then the epidemic can tip upward just as dramatically as our flu did when the number of exposed people went from fifty to fifty-five. On the other hand, even a small decrease in new infections can cause the epidemic to nose-dive. It would be as if the number of people exposed to our flu were cut from fifty to forty-five a day—a change that within a week would push the number of

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CORRECTION

In the "European Waterways" special advertising section (April 22, 1996), Istanbul was incorrectly identified as being located at the entrance to Marmaris Bay. Istanbul is, *in fact, located along the Bosphorus* Strait. Marmaris Bay is found along the Lycian Coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Additionally, travelers wishing to charter a *gulet* (Turkey's indigenous sea-going vessel) can do so on the Lycian Coast of Turkey, not in the Marmara Sea as was mentioned in the section. For information on Turkey, contact the Turkish Tourist Office at **1-212-687-2194.**

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flu victims down to four hundred and seventy-eight.

Nobody really knows what the tipping point for reducing AIDS may be. Donald Des Jarlais, an epidemiologist at Beth Israel Hospital, in Manhattan, estimates that halving new infections to twenty thousand a year would be ideal. Even cutting it to thirty thousand, he says, would probably be enough. The point is that it's not some completely unattainable number. "I think people think that to beat AIDS everybody has to either be sexually abstinent or use a clean needle or a condom all the time," Des Jarlais said. "But you don't really need to completely eliminate risk. If over time you can just cut the number of people capable of transmitting the virus, then our present behavior-change programs could potentially eradicate the disease in this country."

That's the surprising thing about epidemics. They don't behave the way we think they will behave. Suppose, for example, that the number of new H.I.V. infections each year was a hundred thousand, and by some heroic AIDS-education effort you managed to cut that in half. You would expect the size of the epidemic to also be cut in half, right? This is what scientists call a linear assumption—the expectation that every extra increment of effort will produce a corresponding improvement in result. But epidemics aren't linear. Improvement does not correspond directly to effort. All that matters is the tipping point, and because fifty thousand is still above that point, all these heroics will come to naught. The epidemic would still rise. This is the fundamental lesson of nonlinearity. When it comes to fighting epidemics, small changes—like bringing new infections down to thirty thousand from forty thousand—can have huge effects. And large changes—like reducing new infections to fifty thousand from a hundred thousand—can have small effects. It all depends on when and how the changes are made.

The reason this seems surprising is that human beings prefer to think in linear terms. Many expectant mothers, for example, stop drinking entirely, because they've heard that heavy alcohol use carries a high risk of damaging the fetus. They make the perfectly understandable linear assumption that if high doses of alcohol carry a high risk, then low doses

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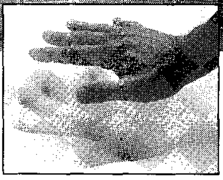

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must carry a low—but still unacceptable—risk. The problem is that fetal-alcohol syndrome isn't linear. According to one study, none of the sixteen problems associated with fetal-alcohol syndrome show up until a pregnant woman starts regularly consuming more than three drinks a day. But try telling that to a neurotic nineties couple.

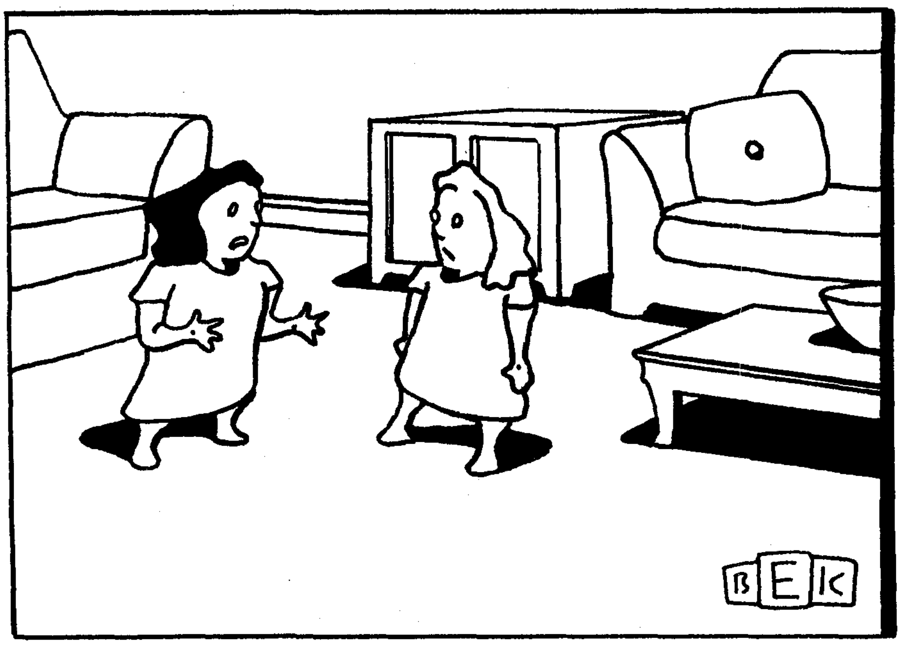
I can remember struggling with these same theoretical questions as a child, when I tried to pour ketchup on my dinner. Like all children encountering this problem for the first time, I assumed that the solution was linear: that steadily increasing hits on the base of the bottle would yield steadily increasing amounts of ketchup out the other end. Not so, my father said, and he recited a ditty that, for me, remains the most concise statement of the fundamental nonlinearity of everyday life:

Tomato ketchup in a bottle—
None will come and then the lot'll.

WHAT does this have to do with the murder rate in Brooklyn? Quite a bit, as it turns out, because in recent years social scientists have started to apply the theory of epidemics to human behavior. The foundational work in this field was done in the early seventies by the economist Thomas Schelling, then at Harvard University, who argued that "white flight" was a tipping-point phenomenon. Since that time, sociologists have actually gone to specific neighborhoods and figured out what the local tipping point is. A racist white neighborhood, for example, might empty out when blacks reach five per cent of the population. A liberal white neighborhood, on the other hand, might not tip until blacks make up forty or fifty per cent. George Galster, of the Urban Institute, in Washington, argues that the same patterns hold for attempts by governments or developers to turn a bad neighborhood around. "You get nothing until you reach the threshold," he says, "then you get *boom*."

Another researcher, David Rowe, a psychologist at the University of Arizona, uses epidemic theory to explain things like rates of sexual intercourse among teenagers. If you take a group of thirteen-year-old virgins and follow them throughout their teen-age years, Rowe says, the pattern in which they first have sex will look like an epidemic curve. Non-virginity starts out at a low level, and then, at a certain point, it spreads from the precocious to the others as if it were a virus.

Some of the most fascinating work, however, comes from Jonathan Crane, a sociologist at the University of Illinois. In a 1991 study in the *American Journal of Sociology*, Crane looked at the effect the number of role models in a community—the professionals, managers, teachers whom the Census Bureau has defined as "high status"—has on the lives of teen-



"All he did was stick gum in my hair, and now I have to put up with all this innuendo."

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agers in the same neighborhood. His answer was surprising. He found little difference in teen-pregnancy rates or school-dropout rates in neighborhoods with between forty and five per cent of high-status workers. But when the number of professionals dropped below five per cent, the problems exploded. For black school kids, for example, as the percentage of high-status workers falls just 2.2 percentage points—from 5.6 per cent to 3.4 per cent—dropout rates more than double. At the same tipping point, the rates of child-bearing for teen-age girls—which barely move at all up to that point—nearly double as well.

The point made by both Crane and Rowe is not simply that social problems are contagious—that non-virgins spread sex to virgins and that when neighborhoods decline good kids become infected by the attitudes of dropouts and teen-age mothers. Their point is that teen-age sex and dropping out of school are contagious in the same way that an infectious disease is contagious. Crane's study essentially means that at the five-per-cent tipping point neighborhoods go from relatively functional to wildly dysfunctional virtually overnight. There is no steady decline: a little change has a huge effect. The neighborhoods below the tipping point look like they've been hit by the Ebola virus.

It is possible to read in these case studies a lesson about the fate of modern liberalism. Liberals have been powerless in recent years to counter the argument that their policy prescriptions don't work. A program that spends, say, an extra thousand dollars to educate inner-city kids gets cut by Congress because it doesn't raise reading scores. But if reading problems are nonlinear the failure of the program doesn't mean—as conservatives might argue—that spending extra money on inner-city kids is wasted. It may mean that we need to spend even more money on these kids so that we can hit their tipping point. Hence liberalism's crisis. Can you imagine explaining the link between tipping points and big government to Newt Gingrich? Epidemic theory, George Galster says, "greatly complicates the execution of public policy. . . . You work, and you work, and you work, and if you haven't quite reached the threshold you don't seem to get any payoff. That's a very tough situation to sustain politically."

At the same time, tipping points give the lie to conservative policies of benign

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neglect. In New York City, for example, one round of cuts in, say, subway maintenance is justified with the observation that the previous round of cuts didn't seem to have any adverse consequences. But that's small comfort. With epidemic problems, as with ketchup, nothing comes and then the lot'll.

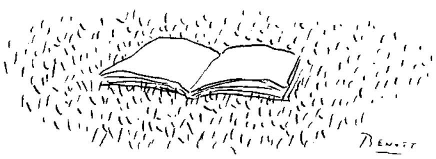
EPIDEMIC theory, in other words, should change the way we think about whether and why social programs work. Now for the critical question: Should it change the way we think about violent crime as well? This is what a few epidemiologists at the Centers for Disease Control, in Atlanta, suggested thirteen years ago, and at the time no one took them particularly seriously. "There was just a small group of us in an old converted bathroom in the sub-subbasement of Building Three at C.D.C.," Mark L. Rosenberg, who heads the Centers' violence group today, says. "Even within C.D.C., we were viewed as a fringe group. We had seven people and our budget was two hundred thousand dollars. People were very skeptical." But that was before Rosenberg's group began looking at things like suicide and gunshot wounds in ways that had never quite occurred to anyone else. Today, bringing epidemiological techniques to bear on violence is one of the hottest ideas in criminal research. "We've got a hundred and ten people and a budget of twenty-two million dollars," Rosenberg says. "There is interest in this all around the world now."

The public-health approach to crime doesn't hold that all crime acts like infectious disease. Clearly, there are neighborhoods where crime is simply endemic—where the appropriate medical analogy for homicide is not something as volatile as AIDS but cancer, a disease that singles out its victims steadily and implacably. There are, however, times and places where the epidemic model seems to make perfect sense. In the United States between the early sixties and the early seventies, the homicide rate doubled. In Stockholm between 1950 and 1970, rape went up three hundred per cent, murder and attempted murder went up six hundred per cent, and robberies a thousand per cent. That's not cancer; that's AIDS.

An even better example is the way that gangs spread guns and violence. "Once crime reaches a certain level, a lot of the gang violence we see is reciprocal," Robert Sampson, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, says. "Acts of violence lead to further acts of violence. You get defensive gun ownership. You get retaliation. There is a nonlinear phenomenon. With a gang shooting, you have a particular act, then a counter-response. It's sort of like an arms race. It can blow up very quickly."

How quickly? Between 1982 and 1992, the number of gang-related homicides in Los Angeles County handled by the L.A.P.D. and the County Sheriff's Department went from a hundred and fifty-eight to six hundred and eighteen. A more interesting number, however, is the proportion of those murders which resulted from drive-by shootings. Between 1979 and 1986, that number fluctuated, according to no particular pattern, between twenty-two and fifty-one: the phenomenon, an epidemiologist would say, was in equilibrium. Then, in 1987, the death toll from drive-bys climbed to fifty-seven, the next year to seventy-one, and the year after that to a hundred and ten; by 1992, it had reached two hundred and eleven. At somewhere between fifty and seventy homicides, the idea of drive-by shootings in L.A. had become epidemic. It tipped. When these results were published last fall in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the paper was entitled "The Epidemic of Gang-Related Homicides in Los Angeles County from 1979 Through 1994." The choice of the word "epidemic" was not metaphorical. "If this were a disease," H. Range Hutson, the physician who was the leading author on the study, says, "you would see the government rushing down here to assess what infectious organism is causing all these injuries and deaths."

Some of the best new ideas in preventing violence borrow heavily from the principles of epidemic theory. Take, for example, the so-called "broken window" hypothesis that has been used around the country as the justification for cracking down on "quality of life" crimes like public urination and drinking. In a famous experiment conducted twenty-seven years ago by the Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo, a car was parked on a street in Palo Alto, where it sat untouched for a week. At the same time, Zimbardo had an identical car parked in a roughly comparable neighborhood in the Bronx, only in this case the license plates were removed and the hood was propped open. Within a day, it was stripped. Then, in a final twist, Zimbardo smashed one of the Palo Alto car's windows with a sledgehammer. Within a few hours, that car, too, was destroyed. Zimbardo's point was that disorder invites even more disorder—that a small deviation from the norm can set into motion a cascade of vandalism and criminality. The broken window was the tipping point.



The broken-window hypothesis was the inspiration for the cleanup of the subway system conducted by the New York City Transit Authority in the late eighties and early nineties. Why was the Transit Authority so intent on removing graffiti from every car and cracking down on the people who leaped over turnstiles without paying? Because those two "trivial" problems were thought to be tipping points—broken windows—that invited far more serious crimes. It is worth noting that not only did this strategy seem to work—since 1990, felonies have fallen more than fifty per cent—but one of its architects was the then chief of the Transit Police, William Bratton, who was later to take his ideas about preventing crime to the city as a whole when he became head of the New York Police Department.

Which brings us to North Brooklyn and the Seventy-fifth Precinct. In the Seven-Five, there are now slightly more officers than before. They stop more cars. They confiscate more guns. They chase away more street-corner loiterers. They shut down more drug markets. They have made a series of what seem, when measured against the extraordinary decline in murders, to be small changes. But it is the nature of nonlinear phenomena that sometimes the most modest of changes can bring about enormous effects. What happened to the murder rate may not be such a mystery in the end. Perhaps what William Bratton and Inspector Mezzadri have done is the equivalent of repairing the broken window or preventing that critical ten or fifteen thousand new H.I.V. infections. Perhaps Brooklyn—and with it New York City—has tipped. ♦

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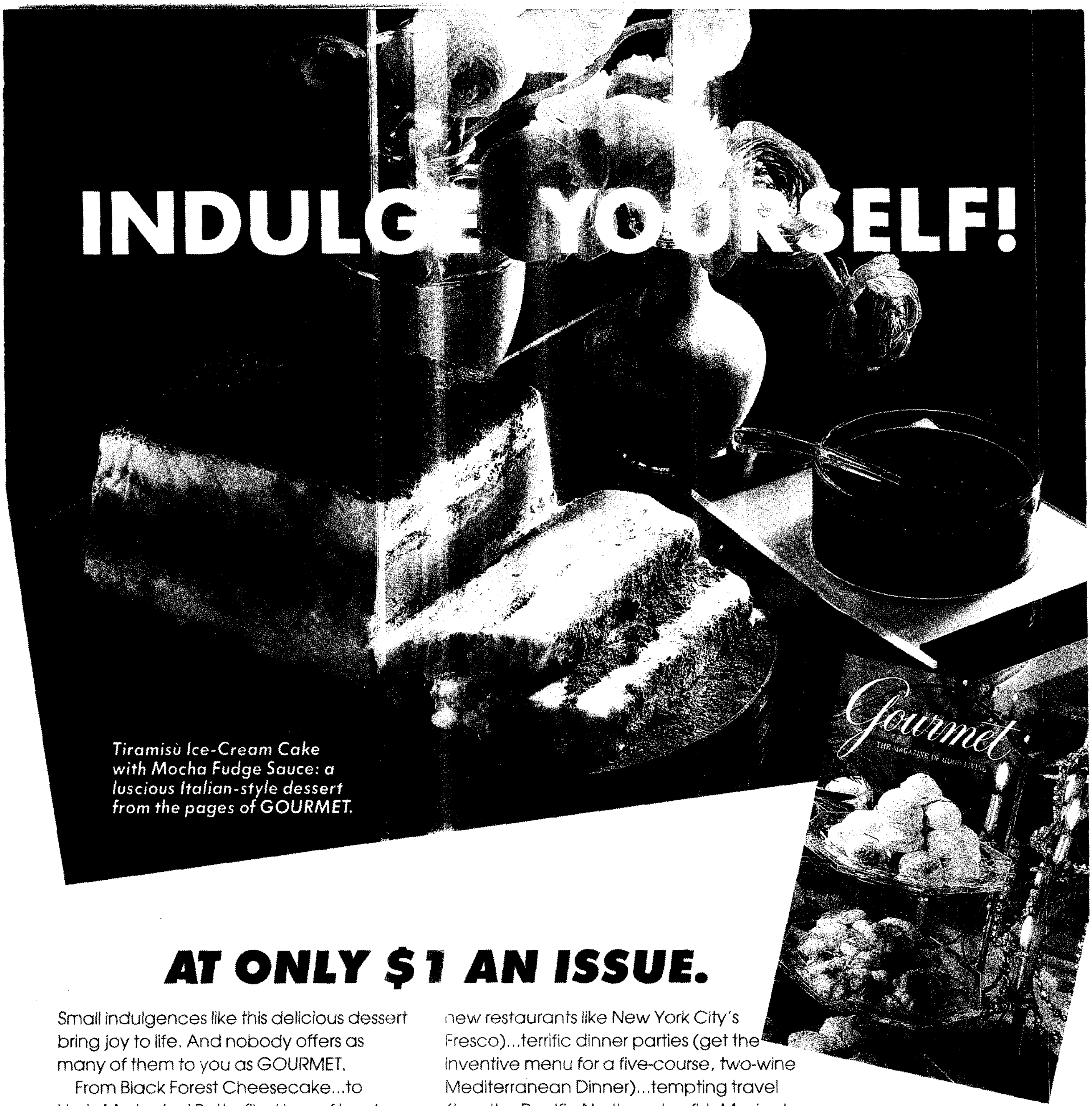

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How François Mitterrand orchestrated his own afterlife.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

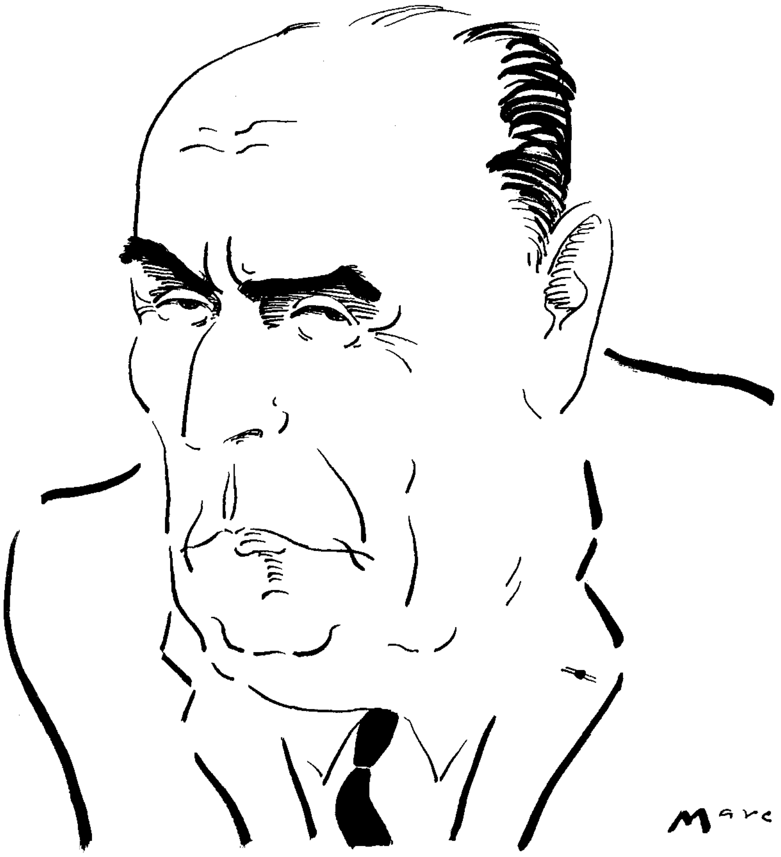
NOT long after he died, on January 8th of this year, a photograph of François Mitterrand on his deathbed appeared in *Paris-Match*. In the photo, Mitterrand, who for the fourteen years that he was President of France liked to be known as the "*force tranquille*," looked unsurprisingly tranquil but also pretty forceful, all things considered. The details were right. The bed he had chosen to die on was not a hospital bed or a state bed but a good French bed: a medium-sized married couple's bed, larger than an American twin but smaller than an American queen, and with a white bedspread looking as if it had just been smoothed out by the *femme de ménage*—the kind of correct, Seventh Arrondissement family bed that every Frenchman would hope to die on. Mitterrand was, considerately, lying lightly on top of the bedclothes, dressed for a Sunday promenade, in a dark-gray suit and shoes. With his Medici nose and *boulanger's* dewlaps, he looked the way the French like their leaders to look—dignified and serene without trying too hard for the effect. No one knows for sure who took the picture. The "Guignols d'Info," a marionette satire that appears on television every night, supplied the only sensible explanation: it showed Mitterrand stretched out on that bed, lifeless, with the cable release of a camera held tightly in his hand.

Five months later, the dead Mitterrand remains the most potent politician in France. He is France's Elvis: the uglier the revelations, the more passionate his cult becomes. Since January, at least ten books by or about Mitterrand have been published here, and they dominate the magazines and the talk shows and the best-seller lists. In addition to Mitterrand's two new volumes of reflections—one about his last years, the other about France and Germany—the new books include a biography of Mitterrand by the editor of the big right-wing daily *Le Figaro;* another by the editor of the big center-left daily *Le Monde;* a philosophical reminiscence by the talk-show host and Mitterrand friend Laure Adler, the Charlie Rose of Paris; an exposé by a former confidant; and intimate memoirs by his wife, his doctor, and his dog. (The dog's book is a three-hundred-page parody, entitled "Aboitim 1," in which Mitterrand's Labrador retriever, Baltique, records his master's sonorous platitudes.)

IN death, Mitterrand has managed, as he must have hoped he would, to drive his successor right out of the limelight. Jacques Chirac is becoming one of those fin-de-siècle political characters, like Sadat and Gorbachev, whose most passionate constituency seems to be the Op-Ed page of the *Times*. To the French eye, Chirac lacks gravitas. In campaigning for the Presidency, he shattered its aura by declaring that his priority would be not the Power of the State or the Glory of the Nation but "*emplois, emplois, emplois*"—"jobs, jobs, jobs." When he hadn't been able to produce them months after he won the election, last May, his popularity ratings sank to the thirties, and have hardly recovered. Even his clothes seem to be in rebellion against him. On the first anniversary of his election, Chirac arranged to be seen striding boldly, Reagan style, across the grounds of the Élysée Palace toward some urgent, off-camera rendezvous. But unseasonable early-May winds kept lofting his tie up into his face, and he kept having to push it back down as he walked, and finally he had to stop and wrestle it back onto his chest, like a snake handler coming to grips with a boa. This incident was shown here again and again on TV, sometimes in slow motion, like the Zapruder film in "J.F.K."

The model of his predecessor is so potent that Chirac, who was once an un-French-like dynamo of bounce and vitality, has become a pathetic, imitative figure, a kind of Mitterrand wannabe. On television, he speaks in a slow, syrupy singsong, with an ormolu clock ticking away behind him; the effect is that of a hypnotist who isn't hypnotizing anybody. A few months after the former President's funeral, when Mitterrand's mistress, Anne Pingeot, and their daughter, Mazarine, made a much admired public appearance, Chirac was featured on the cover of *Paris-Match*, ostentatiously hugging his daughter, Claude, who had just given birth to her own illegitimate child. (Presumably, he had decided to delegate this odd new Presidential responsibility to another member of the family, the way American Presidents assign their kids to attend foreign funerals.) People gossip here about Chirac's sex life—he uses the informal *tu* on practically everyone, but his high-toned wife, Bernadette, addresses him with the formal *vous*—yet there is a general feeling that he wouldn't have the sang-froid to go out and keep an entire second family at a second official residence, as Mitterrand did. Chirac's moral compass points in more or less the same direction that everybody else's does. Mitterrand had a moral compass on which all four directions were marked "North": however devious his path, he remained serenely convinced that he was always headed in the same direction.

The standard journalistic explanation of the long afterlife of Mitterrand is simple: the French love authoritarian leaders and pine for them when they're gone. In fact, Mitterrand was, by American standards, a relatively weak leader. For part of his time in office, he presided over determined right-wing legislatures, and had to share his power with determined right-wing leaders. Anyway, a lot of the Mitterrand literature isn't reverent at all but, rather, critical to the point of mockery, and mocking to the point of cruelty. To an American, accustomed to the Protestant convention that death turns every man into his own monument, the startling thing is that "Aboitim," the dog parody, was published only after Mitterrand's death.



Mitterrand understood that there was something useful to the reputation of a public man in his appearing to have an unmined vein of bad conduct.

COURTESY OF MARC BOXER ESTATE

But this is as Mitterrand wanted it. He had the intelligence to understand, like Dr. Johnson, that fame is a shuttlecock, and has to be hit on both sides to stay aloft. In the last few years of his life, Mitterrand oversaw two literatures—a positive literature, designed to make him look good, and an anti-literature, designed to make him look bad. Neither literature demanded a lot of imagination, for his political career, which began fifty years ago, at the time of the Liberation, had always been bizarrely mottled—so mottled that for a long time it seemed impossible that he would ever get the top job.

Mitterrand was one of those politicians—Disraeli was another—the bald facts of whose career are always worth reciting, since those facts are so hard to credit. Mitterrand had first attained public renown in the forties, as the organizer of a movement for former French prisoners of war, an important pressure group in post-Occupation France. Throughout the fifties, the years of the Fourth Republic, when France came to see its democratic government as an increasingly mirthless circus, Mitterrand had been one of the leading aerialists, holding portfolios in one failed government after another, and engaging in endless rounds of opportunistic maneuvering. After Charles de Gaulle and his "Presidential" Fifth Republic came to power, in 1958, Mitterrand became the most vociferous left-wing opponent of Gaullism, referring to de Gaulle's government as a "permanent coup d'état." Mitterrand became particularly notorious in 1959, after he "survived" an assassination attempt that many people believe he staged himself, as a promotional stunt. He was at that point probably the most discredited politician in Europe, the image of everything shady, self-seeking, and phony in French public life. In the sixties, he reorganized the French left and ran for President, unsuccessfully, against de Gaulle in 1965. In 1971, he took over the tiny, impotent Socialist Party, enlarged its membership while reducing it to a personal machine, and then, in 1974, lost another Presidential election, to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

But in 1981 Mitterrand, in alliance with the large, stupid (and then still unapologetically Stalinist) French Communist Party, defeated Giscard and, against all odds, brought the left to power. For a couple of giddy years, he presided over an ambitious program of nationalization, but by 1983 it was seen to have failed, whereupon he abruptly changed programs and Prime Ministers, and "allowed" the Communists to leave the ruling coalition. Over the next twelve years, he led the country into a new form of German-style "social capitalism," and watched France become an almost absurdly prosperous free-market state.

Mitterrand wanted to insure that when the revelations about his mixed and devious life came out, as he knew they would, they would extend his cult rather than damage it. He accomplished this by confiding the worst things he had done to the people who would be inclined to take the harshest possible view of them. He also understood that there could be something useful to the long-term reputation of a public man in his appearing to have an unmined vein of bad conduct. (In the old days, a French king was sliced open after his death and subjected to a public autopsy; if some organs were found to have been diseased, the discovery wasn't such bad news. It made the old man even more of a marvel.)

MITTERRAND was a man of formidable literary culture—he could recite the last lines of "Ulysses" by heart—without having any extraordinary literary gift. Yet he impersonated a literary man so convincingly that his intimates left his presence convinced that what he had imparted to them was literature. Even *Le Figaro's* editor, the hardboiled right-wing journalist Franz-Olivier Giesbert, whose admirable biography of Mitterrand is written, American style, in short, snappy paragraphs and brief, pointed chapters, proudly reproduces some of the President's previously unpublished lyric poems, which Mitterrand presumably slipped to him. The first is called "Month of June" and reads, in part:

> When the grasses are high
> So as to give the fields
> The allure of the sea
>
> When the happiness of life is
> contained
> In your hand . . .
> When the longest days
> Are proud to be the
> Prettiest ones, too . . .
>
> There is the month of June.

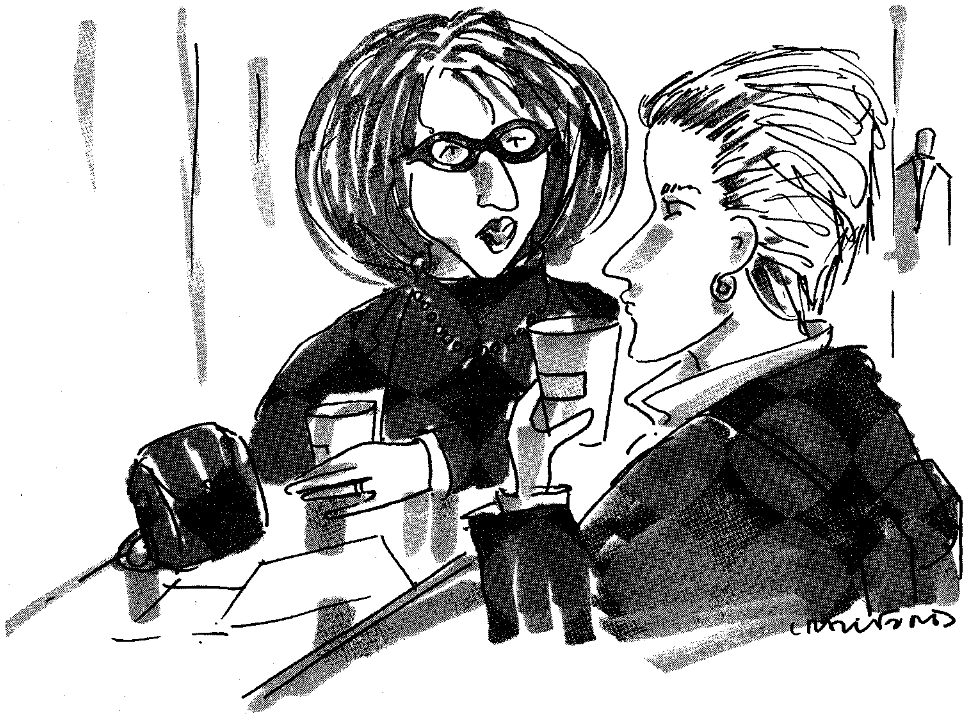
In another moment, his wife, Danielle, in her memoir, confides to the dying Mitterrand that she is going to call her book "En Toutes Libertés"—"In All Liberties." (The plural doesn't really work in French, either.) "Where does it stop, liberty?" the sage responds. "Where does license begin? When does one liberty become menacing to others?" As quick with a *stylo* as any other confidant, Danielle noted that one down, and made sure that it saw print.

Mitterrand knew that the seven *grands projets* he had brought into being during his lifetime—among them the Louvre Pyramid, the National Library, and the Bastille Opera—would be countered after his death by the three *grands secrets*. The first, and potentially the most damaging, *grand secret* concerned his behavior during the war. The story was revealed, with Mitterrand's tacit coöperation, in a book entitled "A French Youth," written by an impeccably upright historian named Pierre Péan, and published in 1994, while Mitterrand was still President. Péan had discovered, perhaps even with the President's aid, that in the thirties the teen-age Mitterrand had ties to extremist, right-wing groups. Then, during the war, and shortly after his escape from a German prison camp, Péan also revealed, Mitterrand was awarded the Francisque—a Vichy decoration designed to reward only those who before the war were on the "national" (that is, anti-Republican) side. A photograph of Mitterrand being introduced to Marshal Pétain was published in Péan's book.

It was the left that was most offended by the Vichy revelations, but, precisely because of this, it now became possible, as Mitterrand knew it would, for those on the right to defend him for the first time; *their* history was now on trial.

Giesbert's biography effectively deals with the worst of these charges. Giesbert points out that, whatever Mitterrand's ambivalence at the onset of the war, it remains beyond dispute that under the code name of Morland he became an important Resistance leader as early as 1942, at a time when the outcome of the war was still in the balance, and that he was a *résistant* of unexampled courage and recklessness. He once rose at a public meeting in Occupied Paris to denounce the Vichy Prime Minister Pierre Laval to his face. Giesbert also establishes that the Francisque decoration was one that the Resistance leadership officially encouraged its members to accept, as a useful cover.

Yet Mitterrand, by making sure that his particular connec-



"You went to Barneys without me? You slut!"

tions with Vichy during the war would come out in great detail, performed an amazing sleight of hand: he drew his audience's attention away from the deeper Vichy spirit that persisted in his life long after the war was over. The murderous Vichy police chief René Bousquet was for many years a visitor to the Mitterrand dinner table, and in the early days Mitterrand was financed by the L'Oréal company, whose management had a record of collaboration. (His first job after the war was that of the editor of *Votre Beauté,* a L'Oréal women's magazine.) He remained throughout his life unreconciled to the Gaullist denunciation of Vichy, and sought always some note of remission, of understanding, of forgiveness. He regularly sent flowers to Pétain's grave. In fact, Mitterrand's reputation benefitted, in a curious way, from the revelations about his wartime role—or, at least, the revelations did not hinder the growth of his cult. The Occupation forced nearly everybody in France into a morally ambiguous role, so the moral ambiguity of Mitterrand's own experience, even if it was less truly ambiguous than just duplicitous, seemed only to echo his country's. By focussing attention on what he did with certain people during the war, amid the common darkness, he managed to draw attention away from what he did with the same people after the war, which had a shadiness all its own.

THE Mazarine episode was another *grand secret.* It was not simply that Mitterrand had an illegitimate child, which in itself would not amount to much of anything, but that he kept an entire separate second family, like a character in a fifties French comedy. Anne Pingeot, Mazarine's mother, who is a scholar of nineteenth-century sculpture, was not really his mistress; she was a second wife. He spent the weeks with Danielle at the Élysée, and the weekends with Anne and Mazarine at the château of Souzy-la-Briche, another *propriété de la nation* that the French President had at his disposal. One day, he would be found with Danielle on the Rue de Bièvre, in the Fifth Arrondissement, and the next, chez Anne on the Rue Jacob, in the Sixth. He had two country residences, too: one at Latche, in the Landes, for Danielle, their two sons, and the Labradors; one in Gordes, in Provence, for Anne, Mazarine, and the cats. He spent Christmas with Anne and Mazarine and New Year's Day with Danielle and his sons. These arrangements were widely known yet never made public. (He had other liaisons. He loved women, particularly their feet. He asked his conquests to take their shoes off in front of him, so that he could caress their insteps.)

Yet Anne, it seems, was not at all unhappy. Comparisons between the modern French state and the ancien régime are always tendentious, and therefore irresistible, but in this case the comparison between Anne's role and that of the King's mistresses established at Versailles doesn't seem inapt: like Mme. de Maintenon or Mme. de Pompadour, she knew her role, and that it was, on the whole, better than the Queen's. Mitterrand made no attempt to hide his paternity from his daughter. When Mazarine was asked at school what her father did, she announced, "He is President of the Republic." As one Parisian said not long ago, on this front he was *génial:* he treated his mistress lovingly and his wife impeccably. It was only at his funeral that the two families met.

Finally, there was the third *grand secret,* the masquerade about his prostate cancer, which was not only kept secret for fifteen years but actively lied about in the President's health bulletins. Mitterrand seems, on the evidence, to have behaved well, even nobly. What happened to him was almost impossibly cruel. Only a few months after his first election to the Presidency, in 1981—the final, happy vindication of forty years of mostly miserable political struggle—he was told by his doctor that he had prostate cancer (both his father and his younger brother died of it) and that it had already spread to the bone. "I'm finished," Mitterrand said weakly, and for a while he thought he was. But not only did he rally: he survived for fifteen years, which was at least ten more years than the doctors ever thought he would have, and during all those years he was well aware that any news of his illness or its gravity would debilitate him politically. Had he been more honest, he would have been less effective and, he saw accurately, would

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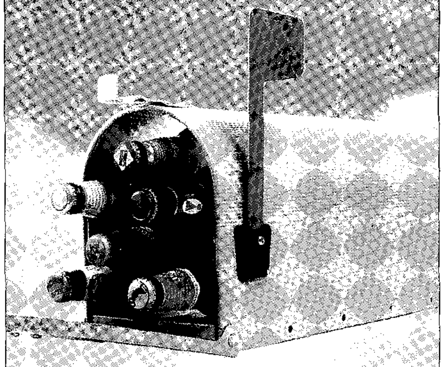

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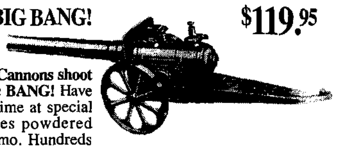

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"Buckled up for safety, Slim?"

• •

have been unnecessarily consigning his own fate to the shaky predictions of his doctors. Here, again, what Mitterrand supposedly did wrong looks a lot more like a forgotten kind of rightness.

All the Mitterrand books have essentially these same three secrets to reveal, and each offers the secrets in a slightly different tone, or with a slightly different emphasis—depending, one suspects, mostly on what Mitterrand offered each author. The most revelatory of the books is also the most naïve and emotionally undisciplined, and that is Mme. Mitterrand's memoir. Its cover shows her looking out of a rainy window, like the heroine of a "Bonjour, Tristesse" romance. Despite the melancholic packaging, it has been the subject of the first American-style P.R. campaign in French publishing history. Most of the attention has been centered on the revelation—which takes up no more than two or three pages—that she knew all about her husband's sex life. Yet, once past the taciturn confession of her husband's infidelities, one discovers that it is the real accomplishment of her memoir to explain the emotional roots of Mitterrand's politics, and therefore of his cult.

When Danielle Gouze met François Mitterrand, in her native Burgundy, he was a war hero and she was the local beauty. (One of the weird pleasures of her book is to watch how over the years her beauty metamorphosed into his, until she was nearly his twin.) She remains an exasperatingly innocent woman. She is melancholy, wistful, unrealistic—a Lady Bountiful visiting the Cubans and the Kurds and the Tibetans, all of whose causes she has championed and patronized. (She admits that her ideas about Tibet came from watching "Lost Horizon.")

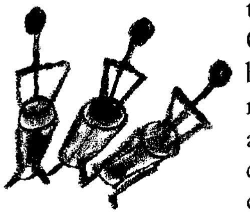
Her book offers, in unsubtle colors, her husband's vision of France. She has embraced the ideology in a less highfalutin form, as spouses often do. There is, first, the extraordinary nostalgia for *la douce France:* the deep, old France that begins outside Paris; the France of small villages and gentlemen farmers. This is an emotion that runs much deeper, and is more real, in France than anything comparable in America. (Because France is a small country, you often can actually go back to where you came from.) Mitterrand himself expressed the emotion perfectly, telling one of his confidants that he had always mistrusted de Gaulle because the General once said, in a famous phrase, that he had "a certain idea of France." Mitterrand himself, he explained, had instead a certain "sensation" of France—a feeling about France. Anyone who had to have ideas about France didn't understand France. In Danielle's book, this deep longing for a lost France—the cassis-scented nostalgia for village life—extends even to her description of the Mitterrands' early years in Paris, where they lived in an apartment in the mild Fifth Arrondissement. There was an "art of living inherent to the street," she coos. "It was like a village"—though the Fifth around Saint-Germain is about as much like a village as Greenwich Village is. Her pages are filled with a sense of Mitterrand's "sensation of France"—old, dignified, lulling, formal. The family's other Labradors were named Hélios, Lotus, Goliath, Atchoum. Danielle once met Mrs. Bush's dog Millie, and though she mentions the dog, she passes over its name in silence.

THIS profound sense of *la douce France* is also the basis for Mme. Mitterrand's other obsession—her consuming hatred of what she calls "money power." Anything is better than ceding power to a consortium of capitalists, entrepreneurs, bankers, and state managers. At one point, in a chapter entitled "Week-end Chez les Bush," she compares her husband's sincerity to that of the former American President: "the one inspired by the knowledge of the historical evolution of the world and by a care for the dignity of the men who have built it; the other led by the force and hegemony of money, which, he believes, will bring happiness and prosperity." The swerves and changes of her husband's politics are made consistent through her more naïve statement of the emotion at their core: money power is bad, and conspires against the nation. The role of government is to counter money power with national power.

By money power, Mme. Mitterrand means, of course, capitalism—not decent, small shopkeepers' French capitalism but a mysterious, other-controlled form of capitalism, whose real home is not in France but Somewhere Out There. Like all incoherent political theories, hers can easily break down into more manageable elements—into Vichyism, or Socialism, or anti-Americanism—and, not surprisingly, her husband at one time or another flirted with all of these.

His wife's obsession goes to the heart of Mitterrand's real achievement, and to the deepest reasons for his cult. It was Mitterrand's peculiar genius to have let money power enter into the mainstream of French life without seeming to have done so. Even his wife didn't know that he was doing it. From 1983, when he abandoned his first, tentative Socialist policies, Mitterrand, more than any other French politician, modernized his country in the image of the free market. It is often said by his supporters that his greatest achievement was to break the Communist Party in France. But the Communists disappeared all over Western Europe, without Mitterrand to help them go. Mitterrand's real accomplishment was so much more audacious that the French themselves don't always recognize it: he made the French state essentially a modern, market-refereeing mechanism while maintaining a sentiment of money-hating so profound that no one could doubt its authenticity. Like de Gaulle, who could exit from the empire because no one could question the depth of his imperialism, Mitterrand was able to cultivate the free market because no one could question the emotional depth of his anti-capitalism.

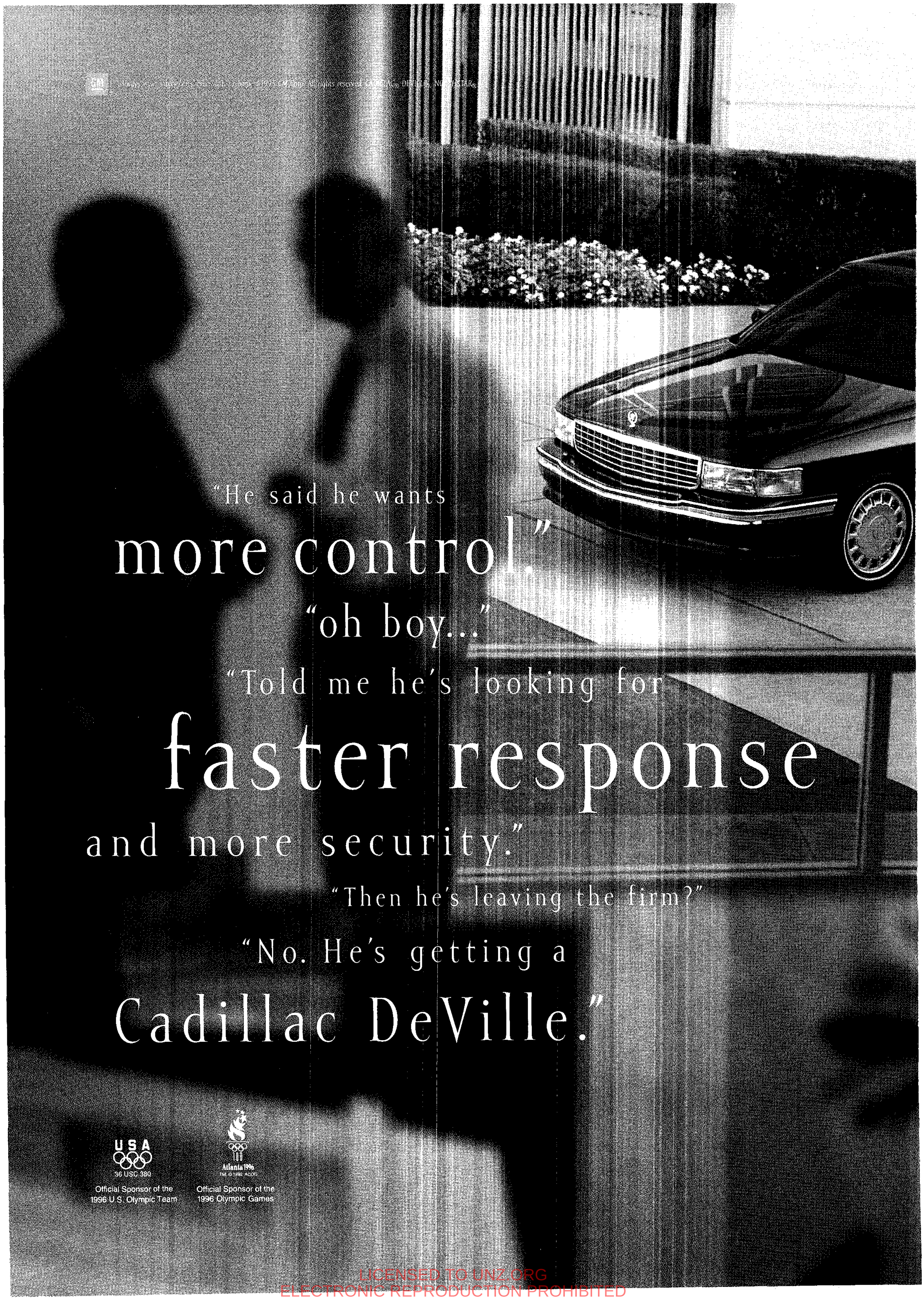
IN Mitterrand, the French got what they want: not so much an authoritarian figure as a romantic one, and romantic in both the strict and the popular senses. In the popular sense, the French want a leader who is a double man—one who is possessed of a secret life and private passions and dark secrets. Mitterrand, with his stage-managed revelations and hard-hearted betrayals, was that. (There was something thrillingly Godfather-like about his political conduct: not a single one of his Socialist Prime Ministers survived being taken into his confidence. Most of them were politically ruined, and one was a suicide. Like John Gotti at the end of his reign, Mitterrand ended up without companions, because he had whacked them all.) But in the strict, nineteenth-century sense of "romantic" the French also want someone who is in love with the idea of history. Mitterrand was that, too. "History" is the obsessive word of the Mitterrand literature: his mantra. The word rings like a bell throughout every book in the Mitterrand canon: he was "part of history," "loved history," "saw things through history," "trusted history," "believed in history," "knew history." The history that he worshipped had nothing to do with the "verdict of history" to which American politicians are constantly appealing. They just mean to name the hope that future journalists may be nicer to them than the current lot are. Mitterrand's idea of history had nothing to do with his being proved right, and everything to do with being made whole—with somehow being absorbed into a larger pattern of events that makes the suffering or the betrayal of individuals seem trivial, beneath notice. (It is this belief that enabled him to suffer so heroically while simultaneously betraying everyone.) He didn't hope to become part of history. He thought that he could *be* history—embody it, force his own conduct to be read and analyzed as though it were already that of a character in a history book.



This notion suited the people he governed. For most of the past two hundred years, it has been the passionate unspoken conviction of the French people that History, in Mitterrand's sense—the high, romantic, sometimes even tragic sense—was happening here. Not happening here in just the modest, decent sense in which history always happens everywhere but in the grand, Hegelian sense: the spirit of the time kept its court in Paris. Americans get exasperated by this belief of the French, since we have had a competitive belief, about ourselves. But up through most of this century, at least, the French belief was completely rational, and possibly true. The great drama of the twentieth century, after all—the attraction to, repulsion from, and final defeat of Marxism—was played out here, with a high degree of intellectual shamefulness and dishonesty but also with a variety and a verve that it had nowhere else.

Suddenly, though, history has stopped happening here; this is just the place where history happened. The change will be dated from the death of Mitterrand, yet it is such a sudden change that the French have no real vocabulary in which to address it yet. The Mitterrand cult is a way of acting it out. It is not unusual for French intellectuals to argue, a little defensively, that the reason Americans still envy France is that the French *have* history—a past to point to, a historical point of view, which Americans can only covet. Yet in fact Americans had not come to France for its past; they had always come for its "now"—for modernity. If some did come for history, it was to see it happen, not to watch it recede. For the past, Americans went to old places, to Greece or Italy.

Now France can seem like an old place, too, even to the French. For the past fifty years, France, far more than England, really has played Athens to America's Rome, but it has always wanted to play Rome to America's Gaul. Now the French are beginning to think that they may in fact be citizens of another medium-sized liberal democracy, with a budget deficit and an employment problem and a lot of old pictures in museums—another country with a history, which History never bothers now to visit. The French worry that they will become simultaneously old and banal, a repository of antiques with the mediocre consumer politics of a small liberal state—a wine cellar with a chamber of commerce. They worry that France may now become just another well-preserved old country, a softer Holland or a bigger Belgium, with too many tourists and a President who promises jobs, jobs, jobs, just like the city manager of Peoria. When they think about this, they think about Mitterrand, too, and the whole thing scares them to death. ♦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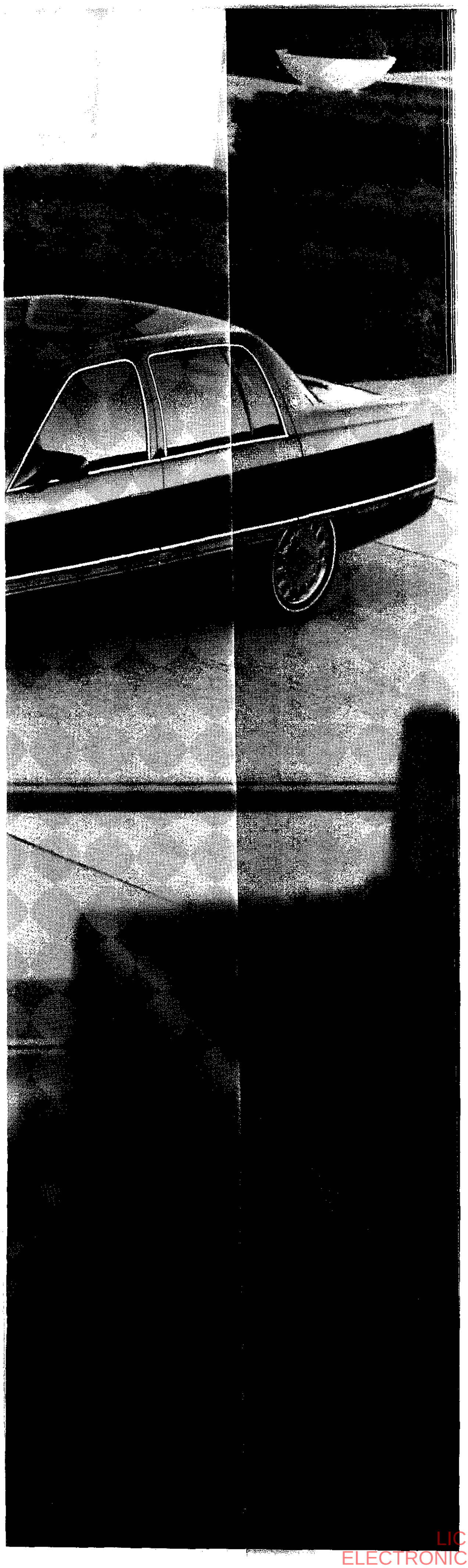

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BACKSTAGE NOTES

DEATH DEFYING DIRECTOR

To work on plays by Woody Allen, Elaine May, and David Mamet is a director's dream, isn't it?

BY MICHAEL BLAKEMORE

"Death Defying Acts" comprises the one-act plays "An Interview," by David Mamet; "Hotline," by Elaine May; and "Central Park West," by Woody Allen. One cast performed all three works last year at New York's Variety Arts Theatre. Michael Blakemore came from London to direct them.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1994

THE excellent Michelangelo Hotel hasn't changed much since my first visit, four years ago, or so it seemed at first glance. I'm back in the same pleasant quarters from which I rehearsed the tour of "Lettice and Lovage." The closer I looked at the room, the more I began to notice such small things as a scratch on a piece of furniture or a loose bathroom fitting. And I daresay the closer the room looked at me it similarly noticed recent dilapidations—less hair, increased paunch, etc. "Noises Off" and "City of Angels," my momentary grasp on Broadway fame, seemed as remote in time as medieval mystery plays.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27TH

Yesterday morning went to Woody Allen's editing room cum theatrette on Park Avenue for preliminary discussions about his play. In life his coloring more delicate than appears on the screen, with pale eyelashes blinking away behind the spectacles; manner extremely courteous but frugal in its expense of energy. A minimalist handshake on arrival and departure. His professional application demands admiration. When I was here in April, he was cutting a film. Next Monday, he starts shooting another. In between time, he's made a third film for TV. And all written by him.

From Woody I went on to Elaine May. Her talk is full of witty indirection and relentless comic shaping, not all of which I always get, probably because I sense that it's a smoke screen from behind which I am being sharply assessed.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1ST

Back in Woody's editing room yesterday, we discussed his play, which he sees—a shade optimistically, I suspect—as a kind of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" We then went through it from beginning to end, him reading, me asking the odd question. As he got more involved with his material, my questions seemed almost to disconcert him, as if I were a member of the audience speaking out during a performance. However, it was a useful exercise and at the end of the morning I returned to my hotel feeling that New York had much to recommend it.

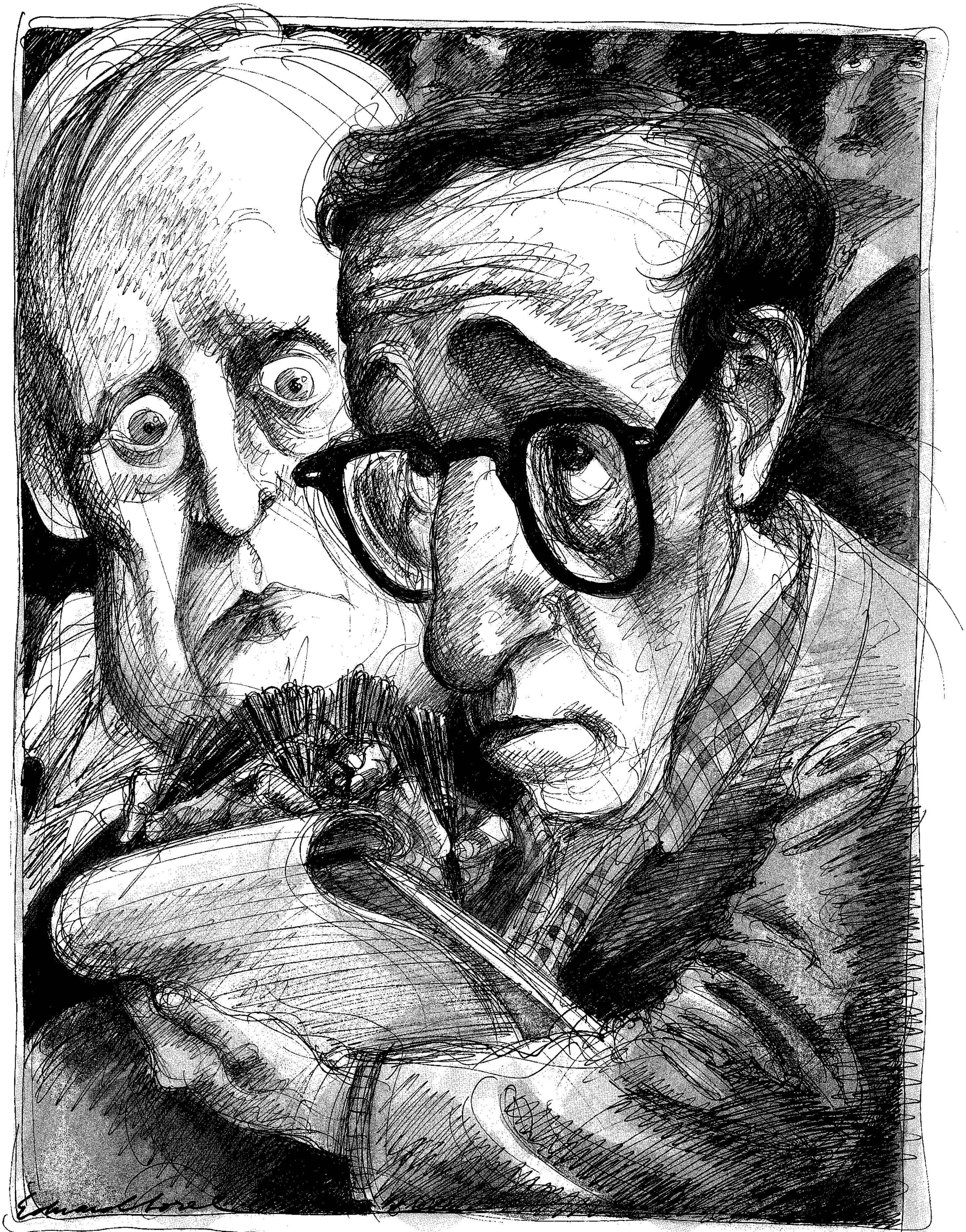
By nightfall I was less sure. That afternoon Woody and Elaine had joined the producers and me to see what talent we had unearthed in the previous four days of auditions. They still talk grandly of names—Gene Hackman, Gene Wilder—which depresses me, because it will mean weeks of wooing followed inevitably by a turndown. Good people showed up to read, but Woody ruled them out if they displayed the least sign of theatrical presentation. He seems to want a sort of open-ended movie acting, but this is hard to sustain over eight performances a week. The uncomfortable thing about the afternoon was that though I was nominally in charge—talking to the actors, telling them when to start and when to stop—there was no doubt where the true focus of the room was. Yet from Woody came not so much as a nod or a smile. The tension in the room was palpable as, one by one, the nervous actors entered to face their judges. Woody, stone-faced, doodled on his list of names, writing tiny, cryptic notes or drawing faces. During one of the less successful auditions I saw him write, in block capitals, "HELP!"

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2ND

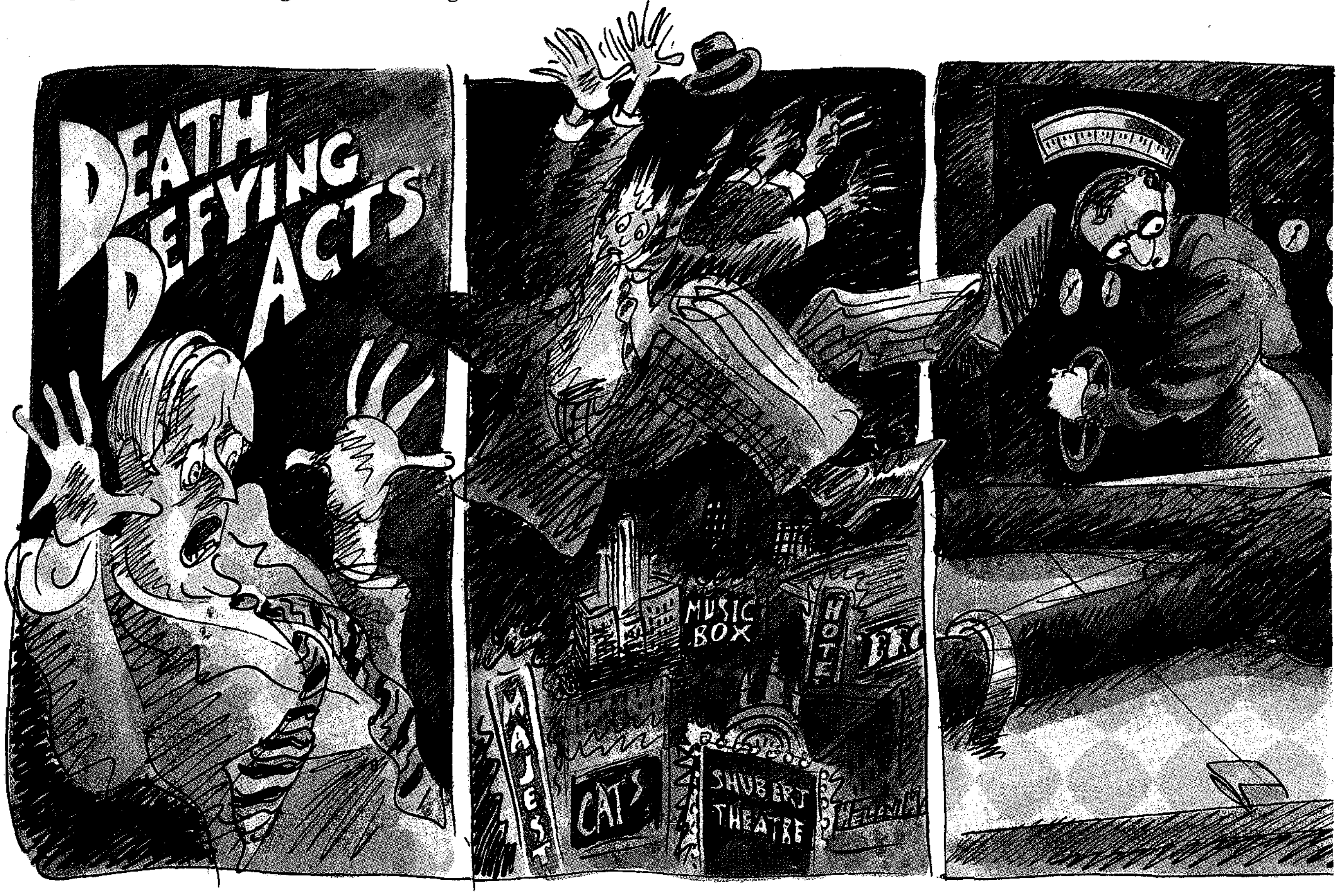
Late yesterday morning I visited Elaine May at her apartment on Central Park West to go through the same exercise as I had the day before with Woody; namely, to go through her play, word by word, ask dumb questions, and have her explain her intentions to me. She played the lead herself in an earlier production in Chicago, and we began the session with a somewhat meandering conversation discussing that performance, the actors we'd seen the day before, and so on. She's interesting to talk to, with the word perhaps in inverted commas. Her replies tend to be so elliptical and indirect that I often wondered which of us was misunderstanding the other. We finished our discussion. Then, as I rose to leave, her friend Phillip Schopper appeared. Elaine introduced him, momentarily forgot my name, so wafted down the hall. Once we'd shaken hands, she reëmerged. It's the kind of neurotic forgetfulness I live with daily, so I wasn't affronted.

On Thursday night Stuart Howard, who's doing our casting, had arranged for Elaine, Woody, the producers, and me to see two contenders in Woody's screening room. The first of them, Garry Shandling, had been suggested by Elaine, who still keeps thinking in terms of names. This was to be a meeting, not a reading; that would follow if the meeting went well. In America, if an actor has sufficient clout as a celebrity

Blakemore and Allen (opposite): "I despair as I see Woody scribbling away as if he were at work on the last chapter of a thousand-page novel." Illustrations by Edward Sorel.


Edward Sorel

he can soften the brutality of the audition process with a whole string of prior formalities, rather like buying a carpet in the Casbah. You sit cross-legged, you talk, you sip coffee; then, as if it were an afterthought, you buy the carpet. The talking stage was in progress—without, however, Woody, who had sent word that he would be thirty minutes late. So we had time to kill. Shandling felt under some obligation to be amusing and frequently was, and Elaine felt under a similar obligation to keep him at ease with sympathetic conversation. He'd just done a movie with her good friend Warren Beatty, and they started eulogizing the star in a kind of deliberately inarticulate showspeak: "Warren is like, you know, I can get in there, you know what I mean? When I look into his eyes, I know what's going on in there, you know?" Elaine answered with thinking so lateral it practically came out her ears. I suppose it's meant to signify sensibilities so complex they're beyond language. I felt completely outside the culture, and wondered for a moment what I was doing in this job.



Then Woody arrived and, in comparison, was as direct as H. L. Mencken. My mood improved. Shandling reminded Woody of a remark attributed to him—that if he could choose to be a part of Warren Beatty's body he'd like to be his fingertips. "I didn't say that," Woody said firmly. "No, I never said that. I might have. But *I* didn't." We recovered from this small hiccup and the conversation meandered on for another ten minutes, Shandling not sure how or when to leave. Elaine found a way of getting him to the door and out. "What are we doing, socializing?" said Woody. "There's this other guy waiting outside." This was Austin Pendleton, who was next into the lion's den, conducted himself with pleasant dignity, but didn't read as well as on the first occasion. (No one does.)

Wednesday, November 9th

Had a very satisfactory telephone conversation with David Mamet. He readily agreed that the title of his play, "A Lawyer in Hell," rather gives the game away. He's calling it "An Interview," instead. I haven't yet mentioned that we now have a title for the evening, "Death Defying Acts"—a little clumsy but O.K. In the business they're calling it "WED," after the first-name initials of the authors. Like all directors, I'm wondering if there shouldn't be an "M" in there somewhere, even if in lowercase.

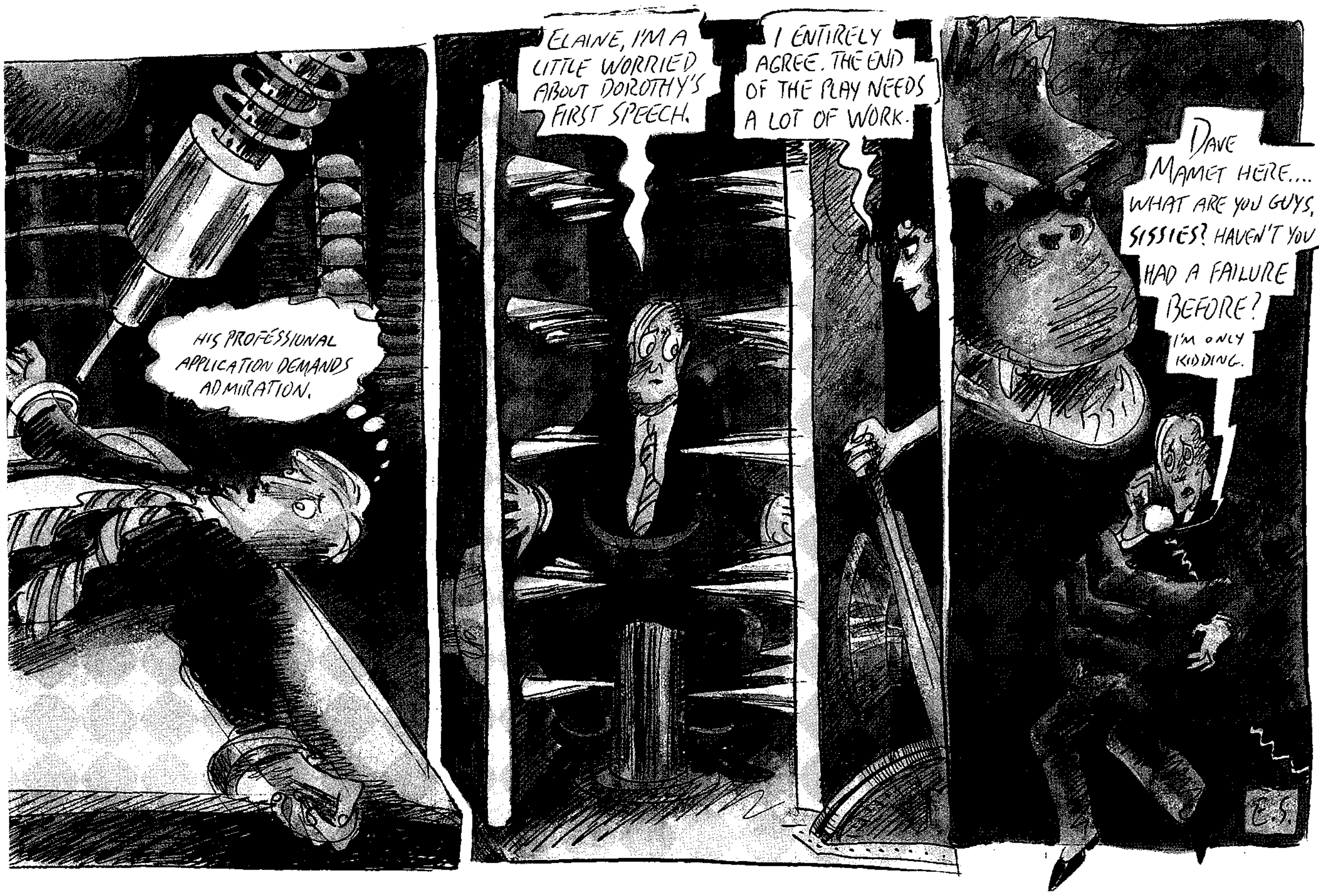
Thursday, November 10th

Last night, my producer Julian Schlossberg drove me to Stamford, Connecticut, to see Vanessa Redgrave and Eileen Atkins in Eileen's "Vita & Virginia," which is also his show. It's playing at the theatre where we will do our two weeks out of town, so I thought it advisable to see the space. I liked the evening as much as it's possible to enjoy such relatively unshaped, if literate, events, and thought Zoe Caldwell had staged it expertly. Eileen's was an accomplished and intelligent performance, though she played it a shade dowdier than the impression I get from those startled photographs of Virginia Woolf. Vanessa as Vita Sackville-West will be terrific if only Zoe can persuade her to abandon her Artless Redgrave Sincerity and play to the hilt the character's patrician certainties.

Backstage, Vanessa looked marvellous and I found myself stirred by her presence, knowing so much about her, the admirable and the less so. I found myself seeing her afresh, as I might have thirty-five years ago, when we were together in the company at Stratford. What did she get out of that season? I've never since asked her, though I've often wanted to. What I got out of it was enough wonder and pain to write a durable novel. For that alone I'm grateful.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11TH

Last night at Woody's editing suite we had what we hoped would be final recalls. At last, as a group—authors, producers, director—there is a certain ease between us, and communication has now become direct and to the point. This I like. Garry Shandling dropped from the picture last week, having been on, then off, then on again, then off again. I don't blame him. He's a talented man with a burgeoning career in movies. Why should he bother to expose himself onstage and lumber me with his indecision about whether this job was the right career move? As it is, I now have pretty much the cast I want: Linda Lavin, a name but essentially a theatre creature and very important to Elaine's play; Gerry Becker, for whom I had to fight; and Paul Guilfoyle.


HIS PROFESSIONAL APPLICATION DEMANDS ADMIRATION.
ELAINE, I'M A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT DOROTHY'S FIRST SPEECH.
I ENTIRELY AGREE. THE END OF THE PLAY NEEDS A LOT OF WORK.
DAVE MAMET HERE.... WHAT ARE YOU GUYS, SISSIES? HAVEN'T YOU HAD A FAILURE BEFORE?
I'M ONLY KIDDING.

Two months later, the plays go into rehearsal. Debra Monk has now joined the cast.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12, 1995

This morning we started on Woody's play, and I spent the day on the long first scene, between the women. The author rang me yesterday morning still concerned, from the first reading on Monday, about Linda's propensity to weep throughout and Debra's to bolt through her text. I conveyed these anxieties, somewhat paraphrased, to the actresses this morning, and compared the play to a Restoration comedy, not in style but in attitude: it has a similar skepticism about human motives, and the same cheerful acceptance of that which is attacked—a self-regarding, privileged class. The Restoration comedies—part of the same society they exposed—were not remotely in the business of changing anything, simply of showing it.

Which is also true of Woody's play. This slant on the material—taking it away from the humanistic empathy that most American drama is about—transformed both performances. Linda's tears dried up at once, and Debra became enigmatically judgmental, which slowed her down considerably. I think both of them may now be going in the right direction.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18TH

Rehearsals continue to be encouraging. This morning I worked with Linda on the Elaine May, in which with any luck she should have a triumph. She has a mind of her own but always listens attentively to what I have to say. This creates a friendly tension that is bracing and productive. It's lovely to work with an actor who would be quite all right without you but whom you know you can help to be better. In the afternoon we did the Mamet with the good-natured Gerry Becker and the incredibly garrulous, obstructive, and engaging Paul Guilfoyle. As soon as I open my mouth, Paul launches into a smoke screen of words unconnected with anything I've just said. I listen politely, and when at last he finishes I repeat my point. He goes off again for another five minutes. I repeat my point. He then implements the note quite brilliantly. You can put up with anything if an actor is talented.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21ST

Yesterday afternoon, Elaine May and Julian Schlossberg came to visit us. It was by arrangement, but nothing can really prepare a cast (or a director, for that matter) for the first time they present their work to the author. Linda was particularly vulnerable, knowing that Elaine not only had written the material but had played Dorothy in the first production. As some sort of protection Linda had applied an extra-thick layer of makeup. We began to run the play, and I looked sympathetically at her agonized orange face as the entire part went straight out of her head. The stage manager did most of her talking for the first twenty minutes. I, too, was somewhat distracted by knowing that Elaine also directs. At one point I became irritated when she took the opportunity of responding to a question I'd asked by addressing the cast at large on how a scene should be played. I hope she's going to observe the rule of filtering her opinions through the director, and not speaking privately to the actors.

I still have difficulty sometimes understanding exactly the point Elaine is trying to make. She has a trick of responding to a question with an answer to something else. An extreme example might be:

Me: "I'm a little worried about Dorothy's first speech."

Elaine: "I entirely agree. The end of the play needs a lot of work."

Elaine's figure-of-eight conversation continued into the evening, when we joined the Schlossbergs for dinner at their apartment. She rather insistently held the floor but seemed well disposed to me, so I presumed that she wasn't displeased with the way rehearsals were progressing. The talk was intensely and exclusively about Show Business—analyzing brilliant moments of performance, discussing the dilemmas facing the talented but besieged Hollywood superstar, or appraising aspects of script structure. It was a conversation almost as enclosed and self-referential as a medieval debate about the number of feathers in an angel's wing. I don't think the larger world imposed itself for one moment on our theme of achieving dramatic excellence. I sometimes wonder if American Show Business—particularly movies and musicals—isn't, with the greatest technological ingenuity, flawless pacing, dazzling displays of star personality, vanishing rapidly up its own arse. Then easing itself out again as money.

Friday, January 27th

On Wednesday, Woody paid us his first visit and pronounced himself delighted.

Today I worked on Elaine's play, concentrating on Linda's side of the stage. Linda has worked hard on her lines, and is almost on top of the huge solo telephone conversation that occupies about twenty minutes in the middle of the play. From my acting days—in particular, playing in John Osborne's "Inadmissible Evidence"—I know how terrifying these long, long speeches can be; you begin, struggling to suppress the thought that fifteen minutes later you will still be talking, the only one holding the stage. It's like taking the first step on a tightrope a mile long. But what a terrific actress she is! Apart from the obvious differences—American and Jewish—she reminds me a little of Maggie Smith: the capacity to swoop from the comic to the touching and back again. I love directing her—though, if she were wrongly handled, I can imagine trouble.

THE IMAGINARY PICNIC

In me still, she takes me fishing for tadpoles,
down the long hill to the pond. Has found the hole
where the book slid behind the baseboard.
Says the light-indigo flowers on the bank are *laurel.*

Today I light my cigarette from her brother's,
my uncle's. Later, I give him mine to light his from,
sheltered from the wind the boat has made.
You see why we do all this. Or you see some.

You my immediate reader, next of kin,
all too similar underneath—you cannot win
in comparison with that day / this day.
It is too green. The food, its lifelong taste, paintable,

on this picnic table. I had a mother who loved me.
Our sky is *blue* behind lit leaves on the family tree:
too easy an explanation. But our trip down to the water
was not / is not a "conspiracy."

Now come the cousins' children, bringing their visual machines:
their dog and their cat near-wild and needing
training. They've done this so the day will be
easier to remember. My mother sings her desire in me,

as if it were unescaped need.
I told her, *It can happen by accident*—not what I mean.
It has happened, I would say. *It is not your "fault."*
I am glad it has happened to me.

—Elizabeth Macklin

Monday, January 30th

Yesterday I had a long and lovely telephone call from Tanya and the kids. She is as frantic as I am, designing the play about Auden on a nonexistent budget, so the only time we can find to talk is on a Sunday. She told me some depressing financial news. Our overdraft is over its limit, and the bank manager has been phoning. I spent so much of last year working on the postproduction and promotion of my film "Country Life" that I neglected my basic livelihood, the theatre. So quite a lot is riding on these one-acters, especially since my next job, the new Michael Frayn play, doesn't start till June, and then for practically no money. The thought of *having* to work at my age takes a lot of the pleasure out of it. If I could simply *choose* to work I think I would go on happily till eighty.

Wednesday, February 1st

This job—three plays by three authors who are also directors—has always held the possibility of nightmare, but I thought I had managed to keep the bad dreams at arm's length.

This afternoon, I'd invited a small audience to watch our final run-through before we go out of town. They sat in scattered clusters around the auditorium. The Mamet got us off to a good start, though Gerry needed a number of prompts. Elaine's play began promisingly, and Linda went on to give her most brilliant performance so far in the long telephone monologue. However, her skill must have intimidated Gerry, because all the energy and drive went out of his performance from the moment she hung up until the end of the play. Confidence returned with "Central Park West," with Debra and Linda both, I thought, on reasonable form. Suddenly Woody, who had been watching from the back, slipped into the seat beside me. He said nothing but stayed with me until the end of the play. We then had a short discussion about when would be a good time for him to give me his thoughts. Later? On the phone tomorrow? Now? We decided now. He began, "This has been a real step backward. It's so bad I don't know where to begin. Debra is racing through it. They're all racing through it. Nobody seems to know what they're saying. Laugh after laugh is being missed."

On and on he went with quiet insistence, the two of us huddled in the stalls, while people went up and down the aisles tactfully staying out of earshot. I was bewildered. Many things had gone wrong: Paul Guilfoyle, wonderful in the Mamet, is still a mile away from his other, lesser parts, and the last ten minutes with everyone onstage needs careful work. But the first half of the play—the dialogue between Debra and Linda, which Woody had liked so much a week ago and now apparently hated—was pretty much as it had been. How can we have been so right then and so wrong now? He's coming to Stamford on Saturday (we open there on Tuesday) and wants a meeting with the cast. My concern is not with any damage this may do to my authority but with the discouragement he may inflict on the actors just before they open.

Elaine, seeing Woody wanting his say, now wants hers. What's unnerved both writers is seeing their plays performed to a small and admittedly unresponsive audience, and they're looking for someone to blame. The truth is, we weren't quite ready to show our work, but we will be. But will anyone listen to me? This is America, where everyone knows how to fix it, and wants to fix it *now*. On his movies when Woody's displeased he fires, then reshoots. And I daresay extreme opinions help him get his way. But in the theatre, where we have to depend on each other for the whole journey, reckless criticism can be extremely destructive.

My job may turn out to be mainly protecting these plays from their creators.

Thursday, February 2nd

This morning Woody rang me at the hotel to discuss some cuts. Overnight he's calmed down a bit, and is now thinking, quite properly, about the text. Notwithstanding yesterday, I found him stimulating to deal with; he's direct and lucid when he speaks and listens attentively when you do. These cuts will be helpful and I hope there will be more to come.

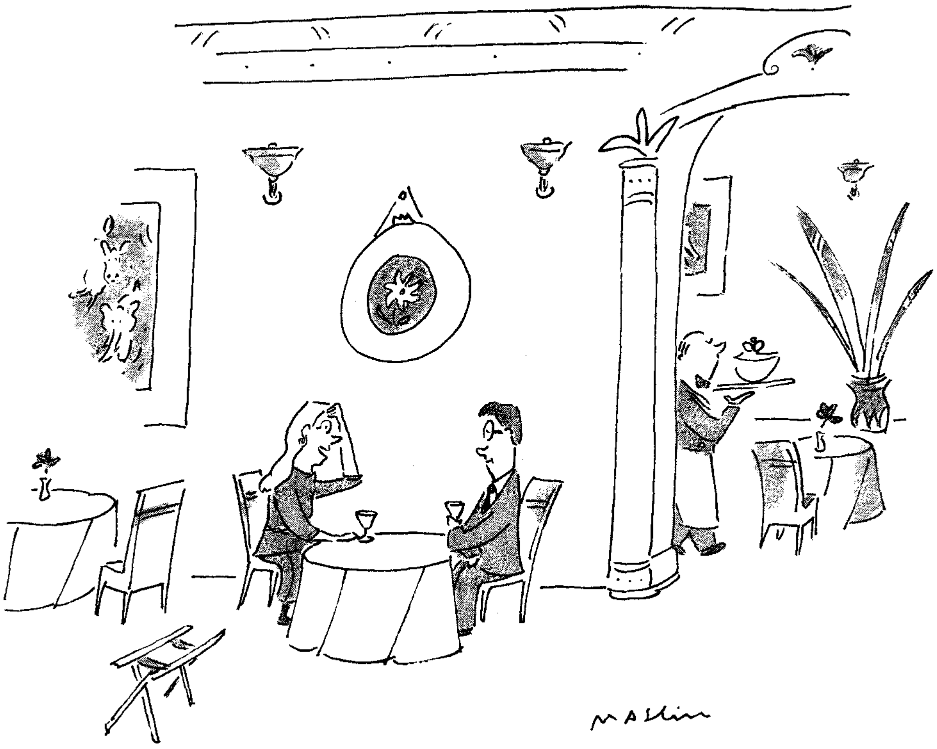
Tuesday, February 7th

Here's an account of the runup to our first public performance in Stamford:

Saturday: Woody insists on visiting us at the start of the day's work to give us his notes, and, with some misgivings, I allow him to speak to the cast directly. The first half hour of his notes is given to one actor, Debra Monk. She's not slow enough, not malicious enough, not funny enough—the list of her shortcomings is endless. Debra, a pro, listens in silence and makes a show of taking notes. But I see a pink rash creeping up her neck, and know that inwardly she's getting more and more upset. Afterward, I whisk her into her dressing room to assure her that Woody is essentially on her side. She's convinced that she's going to be fired. I explain that because he promoted her so strongly for the role in the first place he's overly concerned that she succeed. In spite of her courage, the tears well up.

At the tech of "Central Park West," which occupied the rest of the day, I managed to do some detailed work on the last third. But there is still much to be done. American actors are great when they are center stage but tend to lose interest or go in perverse directions when they are just one part of an ensemble. Even Linda, word perfect in her twenty-minute monologue, barely knows her lines when she has only one or two per page.

Sunday: We run the entire show twice, first in the afternoon, then in the evening. This is the day Jane Greenwood shows us her costumes and we incorporate them into the performance. Woody is there for the first showing of his play, and pronounces himself better pleased. He hands me a tiny piece of paper, with only seven notes on it, and darts out of the building to make a new film before



"No way! Wow! That's my favorite brand of Republicanism, too!"

breakfast, or something. I, however, am uneasy. Debra, gallant but nervous, has shouted all her lines at snail's pace, and, because she is unsure of herself, seems to have doubled in size. Linda is all over the place trying to adjust to an unfamiliar tempo.

In the evening Elaine turns up and so do all three producers. The factions are now in the open: Jean Doumanian and Letty Aronson, Woody's sister, are in Woody's camp, Julian in Elaine's. I'm in the middle, receiving whispered asides, first in one ear, then in the other. Letty: "Why is Linda playing Elaine's play as if it's 'Medea'?" Elaine: "Why is Debra playing Woody's play as if she's a Midwestern ranch owner shouting orders at the hands?" Jean says nothing but looks blankly disappointed, as if she'd thrown a party and only the dull guests have shown up.

Elaine has cuts and additions that she wants to give herself, so late at night we retire to the Ramada lobby, as huge as a stadium, with a sunken area in the middle descending to the hotel's disco. The noise is deafening. For over an hour we discuss maybe four lines of dialogue. At the end of a long day I find the showspeak excruciating. The meeting ends indeterminately, with the actors under the impression that there will be more discussion before we do the cuts, Elaine that they will be implemented. I have long since stopped paying attention.

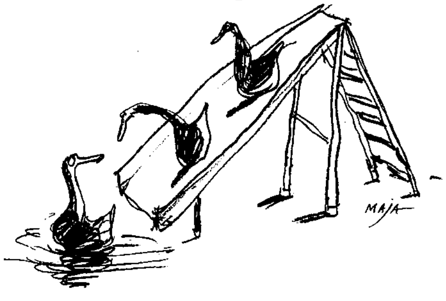
MONDAY: Again, two run-throughs. Woody sees the afternoon show, which strikes me as a distinct improvement on the one the night before. I despair as I see Woody a couple of rows ahead scribbling away as if he were at work on the last chapter of a thousand-page novel. At the end he bounds over to me saying he wants to give the cast some notes. We gather in the Green Room, where the cast is waiting with that odd stillness—interrupted by the turn of a head or the movement of a leg—which you see in penned cattle as they wait for something, probably nasty, to happen. I watch the actors' expressionless faces as the verdict is read out: "A step backward. Debra is now too angry. Linda is posturing. The rest of the cast are like actors, not people." I am also attacked: some of the blocking and business is too cute and theatrical. When he then goes for the costumes in front of the cast, I realize the situation is getting out of control.

That evening when the lights come up on "Hotline" I find Elaine looming over me, eyes blazing like a kestrel descending on a mouse. Why, she demands to know, have her cuts not been implemented? I reply angrily and to the point: because she hasn't yet supplied clear copies of what she wants for the stage management to distribute to me and the cast. I propose that we meet in the Green Room, so that she can specify her exact requirements to the two actors. Everyone in the auditorium is aware of the rising temperature, and for the first time I see a look of interest on Jean Doumanian's face. Later she says to me with a grin, "Michael, you're a good sport."

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9TH

On Tuesday morning, with our first performance ahead, I drank a large cup of coffee and phoned Woody. He wasn't in, so I left a message to ring back, which he did within the hour. I gave him a brief report on the Monday-evening run-through, then said I had a favor to ask of him: in future would he mind funnelling all his notes about the show through me. I explained that I wasn't interested in imposing my own interpretation on his work, only, with luck, augmenting through production what he'd already written. This could not be achieved with a demoralized company. He listened attentively, said he understood the problems, and agreed to my request with the greatest good nature.

I set off to the theatre in an excellent frame of mind, gave notes, and restructured the schedule we had planned for the afternoon—no run-through, just work on selected bits that were worrying either to the cast or me. The performance that night was far better than any of us could have hoped. As always, it was exhilarating to rediscover through an audience the entertainment and surprises in material that for those working on it had become almost wearisomely familiar. Woody delighted, and now thinking hard about the writing itself—what cuts to make, what changes. Elaine wasn't there. She's decided to stay away for a day or two until her rewrites have run themselves in. Had a drink afterward with a happy company in the Ramada stadium, and slept that night without a pill for the first time in weeks.



On Wednesday morning Woody, whose energy has the clarity of distilled water, wakes me up with a telephone call to say he's made some cuts that "will improve the evening by twenty-five per cent!" That afternoon his cuts duly arrive, accompanied by a graceful note to the cast saying that they in no way reflect on performance, only on inadequacies in the writing. At the second performance, that night, the afternoon's work pays off, but Elaine's play falls apart. Fortunately, she's not there to see it. At Julian's suggestion she is now giving me her notes typewritten. She hesitated because she thought I might be offended. On the contrary, I'm delighted; on paper she's as succinct as Woody is in conversation. I'm beginning to understand her better. Her judgment is so sharp that she feels the need to cloak what she wants in rigmaroles of diplomacy. Because she backs away from speaking her mind, and instead "deals" with people, her odd flashes of candor give the disconcerting impression that other, far worse things remain unsaid. But we're beginning to get along.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13TH

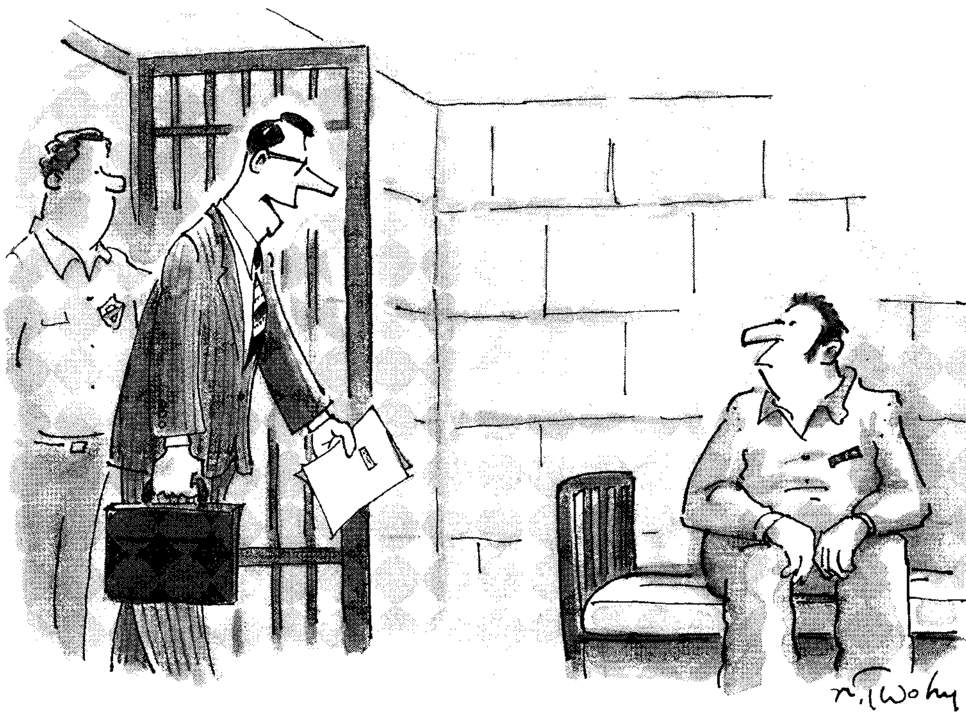
It's two o'clock in the afternoon of our first day off in ten days. I'm still in pajamas. I must now compress three days into one entry.

THURSDAY: The shuttle to take me from the hotel to the theatre is not available, so I decide to walk. It's a bright winter morning with the sun bouncing off the piled snow. I go out to get a sandwich from an Italian delicatessen and am reminded for the first time in almost two weeks how pleasant the wider world can be.

That afternoon we put in Woody's cuts, about which the cast is surprisingly enthusiastic. Once actors have learned lines, they're usually reluctant to forgo so much as a comma. The performance that night goes with a swing.

SATURDAY: David Mamet's "The Cryptogram," in his own production, receives a rave in the *Times*, and around ten in the morning I ring to congratulate him and bring him up to date with his one-acter. He's asleep, but I speak to his wife, Rebecca. In the background are assertive noises from a baby. We chat about his good review. "Not good enough," she says. I'm puzzled for a moment, then she goes on, "You can't say too many good things about it. It's a wonderful bit of work." I make a mental note to tell Tanya of this splendid demonstration of spousal support.

A couple of hours later the phone rings: "Dave Mamet here." I congratulate him and we spend a few minutes discussing "The Cryptogram." "And how's that other turkey going?" he asks. I praise Paul Guilfoyle and allude to a few unscripted production ideas, which I say can be taken out in a minute if he's unhappy with them. But he's splendidly easygoing: "I need a few days to catch up on my life." With a beautiful wife and a new baby, how wise.



"Carl! I thought I'd find you here."

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I set off to the theatre in a state of some anticipation. Woody and Elaine will both be attending the evening performance, which, it being a Saturday night, will be our first full house. Woody, relaxed and expectant, arrives around eight o'clock with his party: Soon-Yi, an attractive young woman who knows her own mind and is very different from the waiflike creature one thought one was seeing in photographs and on television; Jean; Letty and her husband, Sidney; and Helena Bonham Carter, whom I know from London. I ask her what she's doing in the States. "I'm in Woody's new film," she says, and Woody adds, "She plays my wife," rather the way a small boy who knows what he wants might announce the proud ownership of a new train set.

The second house, like most Saturday nights, is a disappointment. The audience seems more concerned with digesting their dinners than with attending to the plays. There's laughter, but no edge. Afterward, I go backstage to be met by a nervous company manager, who tells me that Woody's waiting in the Green Room and wants to give the company notes. My heart falls. The actors are exhausted. The last thing they need is more bad news. I join him in the Green Room, close the door, and, without either of us having to allude to it, it's agreed that he'll give his notes to me to pass on. First of all, I have to listen to an almost identical litany of doom-laden complaints, beginning with the familiar "This performance was a great step backward." As he goes on and on, I watch his face—its expression of apparently sincere distress—and reflect on the neurosis at the heart of talent. Woody responds to the show in precise manic-depressive cycles, which have as much to do with the audiences as they do with the various performances. Tonight Soon-Yi and Helena were watching.

I interrupt him to ask for his specific notes. "I've got hundreds and hundreds!" he says. "Let's go through them one by one," I say. The moment we start dealing with specifics, things improve; his notes are on the button and many duplicate my own. We then discuss a new ending he's written, in which the lawyer is not killed by gunfire but receives an undignified wound in the backside, and about which I've already made a few suggestions. His mood has improved, and for a second I catch just a glimpse of tiny teeth in the shadow of a smile.

We have now been alone in the Green Room for about twenty minutes, with the entire backstage waiting upon the outcome. Elaine has seized her chance and visited the trapped and dispirited actors with her notes. As I emerge from my session with Woody, she and Julian whisk me into an empty dressing room so she can explain how she's fixed it. I just want to get out of the building. It's far too late to pass on anyone's notes, so I call the company for one o'clock the following day. In the corridor I reëncounter Helena Bonham Carter. "And how are you getting on with Mr. Allen?" she asks enigmatically.

Later, I lie in bed with my hands behind my head thinking about the absent angel that hovers over this production: David Mamet. I decide that of the three plays his is the only one that I really respect. Could this change if he also turns up in Stamford and starts giving me a hard time? Like lightning.

SUNDAY: In the morning, I pondered Woody's on-off responses and perceived a pattern. The first rehearsal he saw he had loved, the second he hated; the third he liked, the fourth he loathed. Similarly, he loved our first night but loathed last night's performance. Odd numbers were good; even were bad. I would offer this as a superstitious consolation to the cast.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH

Another turbulent week to catch up on.

MONDAY: First thing midmorning there's a telephone call from Letty with a special request from Woody to begin the week's rehearsals by putting in his new ending. I'd been planning to do the Mamet, which got our first performance off to such a good start, but which has since been slowly running out of steam. What with rewrites and cuts on the two other plays I've had to neglect it—unfair to Mamet and to the two actors concerned. I explain this to Letty. She counters by saying that Woody feels the new ending will make all the difference not only to his play but to the entire evening; audiences will leave in an upbeat frame of mind, which will send a glow backward over the two other plays. (What?!) This, she insists, will help us with the critic from *Variety*, who, I'm now informed, has insisted on seeing the play out of town and will be in tomorrow night. So much for the advantages of trying out in Stamford.

TUESDAY: Jean now rings begging me to put in Woody's new ending. When Julian also calls with the same request, I capitulate and alter the rehearsal schedule. The evening performance is appalling, the worst so far. Woody's new ending plays smoothly, but by then it's too late. Afterward, he's waiting for me in the Green Room. It's an odd number so I have my fingers crossed, but without much conviction. Slightly better than last time, he says, but still a million things wrong. I begin to realize that he has an exact reading in his head for every line in the play, and, since he is foremost a performer, any departure from it drives him crazy. He also judges each performance as if it were the only one he's seen, so that if an actor of whom he had previously approved is having an off night, he's suddenly the one who is ruining the show. Debra is now in as the favorite, Linda is emphatically *out*. He describes her performance as camp, theatrical, and "cutesy." "We can always replace her," he says, and I feel a chill run through me. This is madness. We have less than two weeks before we open. I suddenly wonder if this will ever happen.

I stagger out of the Green Room to see Elaine and Julian beckoning me into another open door farther down the corridor. There I meet Elaine's support group—Mike Nichols and Marlo Thomas—whose visit to the show is nicely timed to the worst performance. We discuss the problems in tones that

POSTSCRIPT

TAPS

RICHARD M. CLURMAN, who died suddenly two weeks ago at the age of seventy-two, was not a household name, but his influence on American journalism was profound. Though it had been a quarter century since he left *Time* magazine, where he served as chief of correspondents, as right-hand man to Henry Luce, and as mentor to the generation of journalists now running the show, he continued to exert a presence—through his books on the press and through his role as consigliere to the mourners who turned out to eulogize him on a warm Monday morning last week in a memorial service at Fifth Avenue's Temple Emanu-El.

Oz Elliott, the former editor of *Newsweek*, who met him nearly fifty years ago, when they were junior *Time* writers, said, "While Dick made himself an expert at many things, his true specialty was friendship. . . . He could never do enough for you. If you were stranded in the suburbs by a hurricane and unable to visit your sick baby in a New York hospital, not to worry—Dick would visit that baby and report to you daily. If you were fired from your job in mid-career, Dick would find you a new one. Dick would help you write a lead. Dick did all these things, most of them for me."

William F. Buckley, Jr., with whom Mr. Clurman sailed across two oceans, said, "It came to me last Thursday, when the news reached me just after midnight, that I have always subconsciously looked out for the total Christian, and when I found him he turned out to be a non-practicing Jew."

Harry Evans, president and publisher of Random House, tapped the lectern with his pen, in imitation of Mr. Clurman's trademark dinner-party habit of tapping the glass with a knife to initiate general conversation, and said, "Dick had the journalist's indispensable quality: endless curiosity and the enthusiasm that awakens it in others. . . . He knew the difference between skepticism—the proper banner of the journalist—and cynicism, the mean badge of the nihilist."

David Greenway, the editorial-page editor of the Boston *Globe*, worked for Mr. Clurman as a Saigon correspondent. "During his frequent visits to Saigon, Dick would ask to be taken out in the field. There was a glorious moment when Dick—in uniform and helmet and humping a forty-pound field pack but ever the New Yorker—was told by a rifleman that his pack was buzzing. 'Oh, that must be my electric toothbrush,' Dick said."

David Halberstam said, "Some twenty-five years ago, the police of a metropolitan city ran a sting operation against local gays. One of the people they picked up was a young *Time* reporter. Dick flew out, took care of it, and, as he left town, turned to the bureau chief and said, 'The only two people who know about this are you and me, so if word gets out I will know it was you, and your usefulness to *Time* will be over.' "

The *Time* writer Hugh Sidey remembered the call he got from Mr. Clurman right after the Bay of Pigs invasion: "He tracked me down by phone at the White House and said, 'What do you know?' And I said, 'Absolutely nothing.' And he said, 'Wonderful! Write it!' "

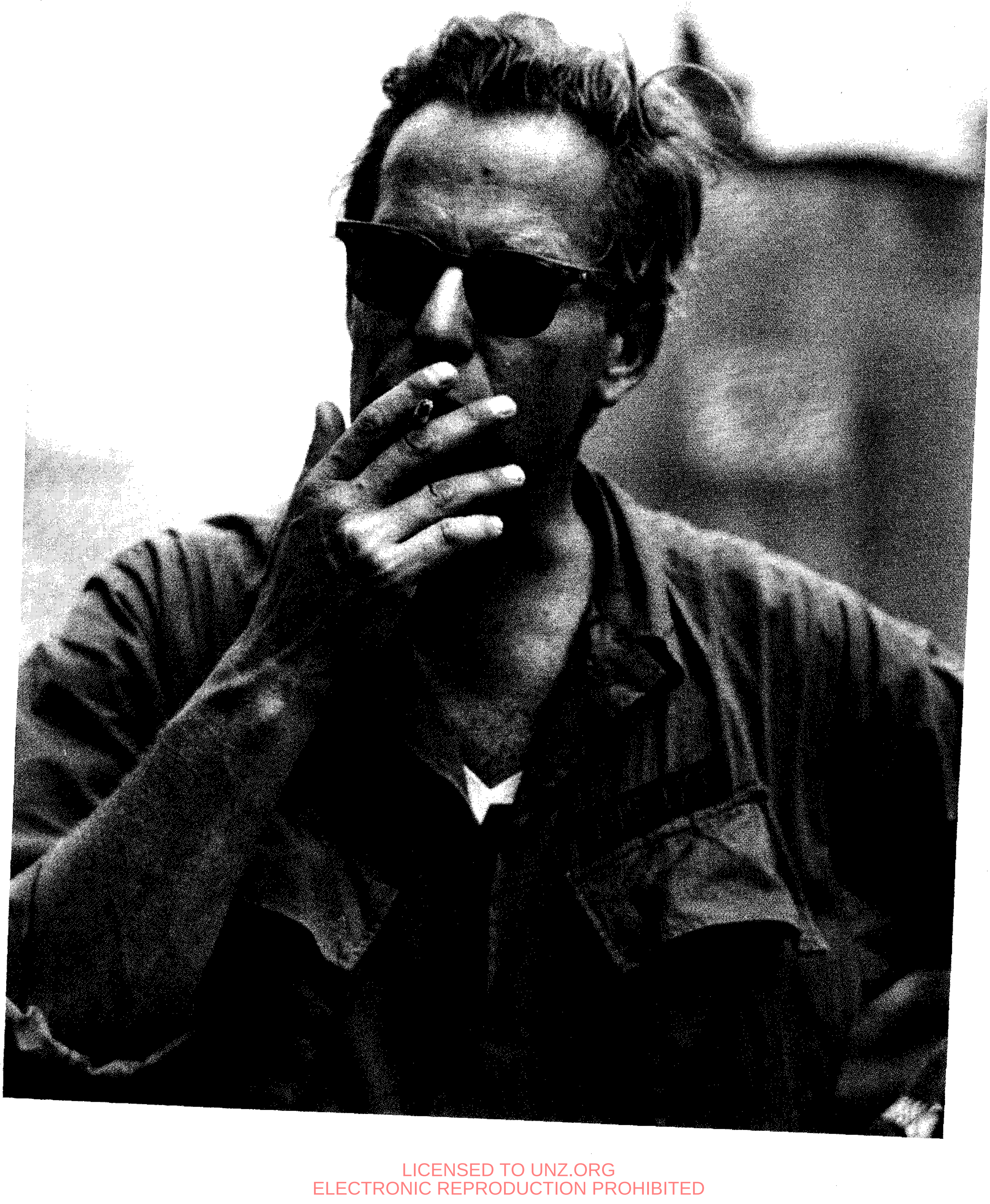
Mike Wallace said, "I missed him last night. Every Sunday after '60 Minutes,' there was a call from Richard Clurman . . . and you listened to what he had to say, because you knew that he cared."

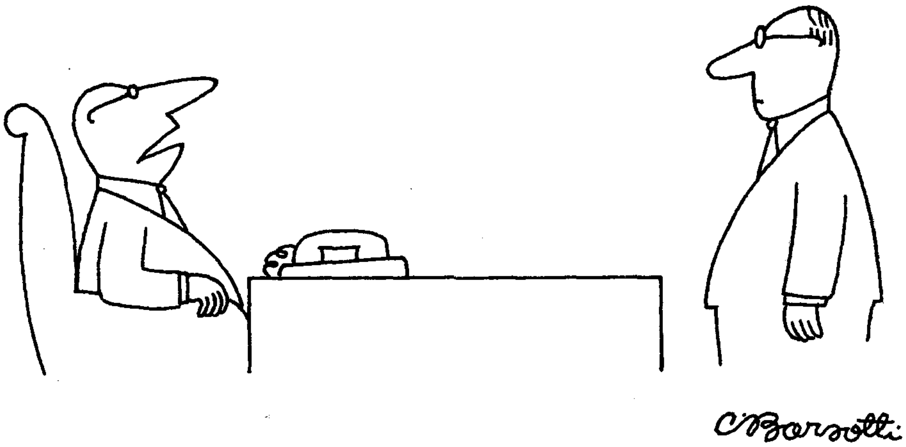
Barbara Walters addressed her remarks to Mr. Clurman's wife, Shirley: "You were in every sense of the word a couple. . . . There has never been a salon like the one you two ran. . . . Dick had arranged so many funerals for departed friends. You know what he's saying? 'Good job, Shirl.' You know what else he's saying? 'Wind it up, Barbara.' "

Mr. Clurman's daughter Susan Emma Clurman spoke of "our dashing daddy." His second daughter, Carol Duning, held up her seven-year-old daughter, Anna, who read her own eulogy to her grandfather. His son, Michael, thanked everyone there for what had taken no work at all—for being friends to his parents.

The cover of the memorial program carried a photograph of Mr. Clurman, reproduced at right, that was taken in Vietnam in 1969. After the service, a woman said she was happy that the photo showed him smoking, because it was almost as hard for his friends to imagine Dick without a cigarette as it is for them to contemplate life without him. —CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

COURTESY OF THE CLURMAN FAMILY





"We only hire temps, and you have a look of permanence about you."

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are blessedly less extreme than Woody's, and Mike makes some courteous suggestions. Elaine, who I know is now very worried about her play, disguises her anxieties with some gallantry.

Back at the hotel I think I'm fairly calm about all this until I turn the light off. Then I'm a Goya etching with bats flying out of my head.

Wednesday: Woody rings midmorning. I can tell he's pushing to get his hands on the actors again. He's convinced a word from him will show them how it should be done. At rehearsals, first thing up is the Mamet, and we have a hugely productive and enjoyable hour and a half. The show that night is sensationally better. Neither the producers nor the authors are there to see it.

Thursday: That evening Elaine attends the performance with more supporters—Herb Gardner and Peter Fiebleman. The two playwrights will undoubtedly pass on their ideas for improvements to Elaine, who will then pass them on to me. She's already had a message from Mike Nichols. "Mike thinks the play could be a real crowd pleaser, but thinks we should turn Dorothy's monologue into a proper telephone conversation with Ken saying things into his phone on the other side of the stage. I could easily write that." *And* add twenty minutes to the length of the play. *And* expect Gerry Becker to master in a few days material he's had trouble getting the hang of in six weeks. *And* have Linda walk off the show because it's no longer the play she first accepted. More madness.

It occurs to me that this meddling energy—everyone putting in his ten cents' worth and struggling for dominance—is at the heart of the American Genius. It produces results because it creates such pressure, even fear, that people come up with ideas simply to survive. It's the dialectic gone crazy; a hundred theses and antitheses struggling, like spermatozoa, to make it as the synthesis. It's undoubtedly effective when the agreed purpose of the exercise is something simple like maximizing profits; less useful when you are trying to see the woods for the trees. And quite catastrophic when you are looking for light at the end of the tunnel.

Friday: Woody sees the performance and afterward we meet in the Green Room. "First the good news," he says. "Linda is ninety-nine per cent better. The rest of it—I'm sorry to be a party pooper—is just terrible." We go through his notes, which he then bundles up and presents to me like sailing orders. I find this offensive and return to the Ramada really quite angry, for the first time.

Saturday: I wake, fed up with my authors and even more fed up with their plays. Always excepting the angelic Mamet. Julian rings and I speak my mind. He explains that Woody's excitability is probably related to the pressures he's under. He's trying to edit one film and write another. His father is ninety-four and ailing. There's been Mia Farrow to deal with. "Bullets Over Broadway," despite rave reviews, isn't doing business. And Woody has agreed to act again, something he doesn't enjoy except in his own films. He's doing "The Sunshine Boys" with Peter Falk for TV. Visiting his cutting room and seeing all those people at work, you take it for granted that it all keeps going of its own accord.

I unfold Woody's notes and study them with a new curiosity. They are frantically written, about four to the page, most with editorial comment—"Just awful," "*Still* shit," "PATHTIC," which I interpret to mean pathetic. I decide I shall hang on to them in trust for my daughters, so that when they grow up and suddenly need cash they can flog them for an immense sum to the film faculty of some gullible American university.

Tuesday, February 21st

I'm back at the Michelangelo, with a designer chocolate on the bedside table. *Variety* has given the show a rotten review.

Thursday, February 23rd

Yesterday afternoon we had a perfect illustration of the pros and cons of Meddling Energy.

It takes two minutes to make the change from the Mamet into "Hotline," and during that time the audience sits in the dark with nothing happening. I'd suggested to Elaine that she write a brief radio play consisting of a montage of about three or four telephone calls to the suicide center. The first could be serious, then they should become increasingly funny. This would achieve one of Mike Nichols's better suggestions, that we invent something to begin Elaine's play on a clean laugh.

I was told that morning by Julian that Elaine had gone ahead and booked a sound studio for three in the afternoon. She had neglected, however, 1) to find out the exact length of time the audience sits in the dark, 2) to engage the right number of actors to do the recording, 3) to send advance copies of the new material to me, and 4) to ask Jan Nebozenko, our own soundman, along; I did this at once.

The first half hour was, accordingly, chaotic. I got a glimpse of Elaine's directing technique: strong on feminine authority, weak on organization, but curiously effective. When we ran into what appeared to be an intractable problem—

not having the right equipment, for instance—she would simply turn to one of the technicians in the studio and say, "*You* fix it. I know you can do it. I'll just sit here until it's done." With Julian on hand to do her practical thinking, waving us from one sound studio to another more suitably equipped, we managed to get something on tape, using as actors Julian, Jan, myself, Elaine, Phillip Schopper, and Marlo Thomas, who'd tagged along for the hell of it. What should have taken twenty minutes took two hours, but the results were promising. Last night, Elaine and Phillip took the tapes away to edit them, and today we'll see if they work. I had the funniest call, as a visiting Englishman ringing up the suicide-center hot line under the impression that it provides phone sex.

Friday, February 24th

On Wednesday, I conceded Woody another, and final, opportunity to speak to the cast directly. My instinct told me that this latest intervention would have an effect contrary to the one he hoped, and that when this was demonstrated to him he would finally give me some peace.

We met at the Variety Arts, which, as is usual during a New York technical, was more like a junk yard than a theatre, with ladders, lighting equipment, and rubbish cluttering up the auditorium. The dressing-room accommodation was far too cramped for a meeting, so we gathered in the only space available, behind a curtain at the rear of the balcony. The sounds of hammering and yelled instructions were out of sight, if not out of mind.

He began, courteously, with the two women, taking them gently from point to point. However, as he got into the swing of it and as, one by one, the rest of the cast were introduced into the discussion, he found more and more to object to. Eventually he was simply reading them the play line by line, and at a frantic pace. I sat there feeling a variety of things—initially some hurt pride, then irritation that he should assume I'd not been struggling for weeks with most of these problems. Then, as always, this gave way to a certain fascination with the man himself. He'd scheduled these two hours in what was doubtless a busy day, and was giving himself over to the task with an almost fanatical zeal. I don't think I've ever met anyone so puritanically committed to his work, so consumed by it. It's as if his small frame were in the process of diminishing further in the heat of his activity, like a sculpture made of ice. It is wondrous to behold, but I'm not sure it is enviable.

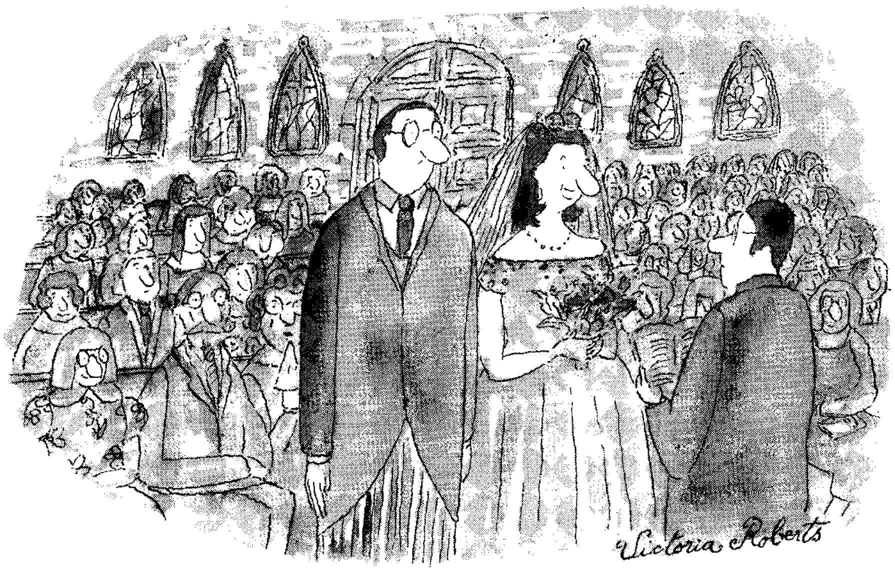
That evening's performance, before a small invited audience, was not one of our best. Like all such audiences, ours wondered just what was wrong with a show they were seeing for nothing. In "Central Park West" the frazzled members of the company rattled through the play, their obedience to Woody's most emphatic demand for speed at odds with their struggle to remember the hundred other things he wanted. It wasn't much of a performance, but at least it had the sort of pace I'd been urging on them throughout Stamford. Afterward I sought out Woody, who was waiting for me but hiding from the audience, at the top of a flight of stairs. "Well?" I inquired. "That was terrible! *Just terrible!* The worst so far. And they were a terrific audience!" (They were?) "I've never seen it so bad! It's so bad I'd rather take it off than have it seen like this. You've got to tell them—really tell them!—how ghastly it is. You've got to be really tough with them!" Debra was no longer the culprit, nor Linda. *The entire company* was guilty. I looked at Woody and wondered quite which of us was going mad.

Monday, February 27th

On Friday morning Woody rang. He asked if he could come to the rehearsal that afternoon, "just to sit at the back." I knew what was bothering him. He thinks I'm too soft on the actors and wanted to be there to make sure I spilled blood. Later Jean rang. She wanted to be there, too. What were they doing, auditioning me? I pointed out that the inadequacies of the night before were directly attributable to Woody's note session. Was I to believe they were holding *me* responsible? My mood had worsened with Jean's call, and blackly I began to plan my afternoon in some detail—what I would say to the company, what we would rehearse. If I wasn't allowed to conduct the rehearsal the way I wanted to, then I would withdraw from the show.

I had another call to make, to David Mamet. Since he hadn't seen the show I felt obliged to spell out the production ideas that aren't actually scripted. As before, I left a message, and he rang back promptly: "Dave Mamet here." I told him what I'd done and he said, "That's a wonderful idea. I like it. Great." I was already feeling better. I then asked him if he could possibly visit us in New York, not just to see his own play in preview but to provide a fresh overview of the entire evening. I believed we had a good show on our hands, but the constant interventions of his colleagues were jeopardizing our chances.

"I've a better idea than me coming to New York," he said. "Why don't you just shoot Woody and Elaine? You should sit them down and say, 'What are you guys, sissies? Haven't you had



"I'm delighted to love, honor, and obey, but I'm keeping my electronic rights."

a failure before?' I'm only kidding."

This cheered me up enormously. I think David stays away from other people's productions of his work because, as author, he knows he cannot be other than disappointed. However, he has enough respect for the process of theatre to know that his interpreters have, as it were, the right to be wrong. What endures? The play on the page. The most perfect production, no less than the most flawed, is doomed to extinction.

I went to rehearsals in an icy rage, which more than compensated for lack of sleep. I felt very concentrated, and in the first two hours achieved all I wanted to with "Hotline."

Woody turned up with Jean some five minutes before I was scheduled to rehearse his play. While the set was being changed he took me aside and reiterated the necessity for the Hard Line. But I had no intention of taking instructions on how to address the actors. The company gathered onstage, watchful and bruised. Linda was looking particularly dangerous. I began by telling them that Woody had his own view of last night's performance. However, I could be useful to them only by conveying my own. I felt that we had a show, and that all of them, at one performance or another, had done justice to their parts, but that last night, in pursuing pace, they had thrown reality out of the window. Their characters were not particularly likable people, but their dilemmas were real enough. They should be played from their own point of view; that is to say, seriously—the belief we all have that for the most part we are right and it is others who are wrong. It occurred to me later that a reading from this journal would have neatly made the point.

We then rehearsed certain moments that work some nights, not others. My adrenaline was up, and Woody must have sensed it, because he kept very quiet. When we came to the scene with the German Luger, I suggested that one of the problems might be too much text. Suddenly Woody was at his professional best, as ruthless with himself as he can be with others, cutting without argument and accepting suggestions. I couldn't help noticing that when he talked to, say, Linda, he forgot all about the Hard Line, and did what all good directors do—try and win the trust and, hopefully, the affection of the actor involved. "That was a really good rehearsal!" he said when we'd finished, and he was right.

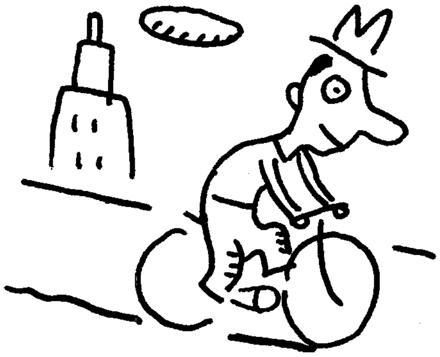
That night, our first New York preview, was far and away the best performance the cast had ever given, and afterward I caught my second sighting of Woody's teeth. "The best so far! That was really quite good!" he said, deploying the only New York understatement I know, the phrase "quite good" meaning excellent.

I didn't watch the Saturday matinée but instead took my assistant, Jenny, to the movies. Afterward we ate at our local Italian, John's, and I had a pasta covered in nothing but an enormous amount of chopped garlic and oil. Back at the theatre I was told Woody wanted to see me. He had cuts and alterations to hand on, and was waiting in a parked car out front. I climbed in and joined him in the back seat, whilst an impassive driver sat up front. It was a bit like a tryst with a gangster. In the warm confinement of the car, Woody shuffled through his pages as I reflected on the potent aroma of red wine and garlic I was sure I was giving off. He told me he would be fine-combing his play at each performance for dead or weak moments, and sending me his revisions the following day.

The evening performance was a mess. The cast was tired, the sound system packed up, Linda dropped her glass of whiskey on the floor; but these accidental disasters seemed to cheer Woody up. He thought they hadn't done too badly. At the interval I'd spoken to Jean. She'd told me that Woody can't stand the smell of garlic. This gave me a certain satisfaction.

Wednesday, March 1st

On our day off, Monday, I woke up feeling decidedly off color. I thought I was developing the pharyngitis that now seems the inevitable accompaniment to the last week of a rehearsal period. On Tuesday I felt worse but dragged myself off to rehearsals to work on the Mamet and refine the transition from that play to Elaine's. This took us till four-thirty, by which time I had Woody breathing down my neck with a fresh sheaf of revisions. Actually, he was breathing down my neck only metaphorically. Knowing that I was ill, he stayed at least six rows behind me, and would only approach me with one hand holding his overcoat across his nose and mouth like a nineteenth-century anarchist. Have I met my match in hypochondria?



Saturday, March 4th

The performance on Thursday, the last before our series of press nights, is good if not exceptional, which is just as it should be. I meet Elaine in the corridor backstage after "Hotline." She seems content with what she's just seen, and in any case knows that it's too late to make changes. Elaine is quiet and looks very vulnerable, and I find myself liking her more than I ever have. I like her realism about her play, sandwiched as it is between the uncompromising Mamet and the concentrated comic resource of the Allen. She knows it's really a sort of attenuated sketch but perhaps forgets that it tells its story with great ingenuity and is the only play in the evening that sets out to engage the audience's sympathy. More than the others it's dependent on performance, but with Linda now on form it's emphatically getting it.

In spite of my declaring the show frozen after Tuesday's performance, Woody is still sending individual cast members envelopes full of changes. All are funny. A few are desperate. ("You slept with my writing partner?" "Once in his new Mercedes. He wanted to test the shock absorbers.") These are not changes you should expect a cast to make the night before they face the critics. Linda refuses to open her envelope.

Sunday, March 5th

At six o'clock on Friday, the first of our press nights, the company assembles in the auditorium for a brief warmup. I'm expecting a closing of the ranks as the moment of truth approaches, but find the company out of temper and squabbling amongst themselves. I decide the short pep talk I'd prepared would probably be counterproductive, so scrap it. At the half hour I do the rounds of the dressing rooms. Almost as important as talent, the thing that defines a stage star and creates a star's luck is the capacity to rise to the challenge of a press night. The history of a career is no more than a record of a succession of these particular nights.

That night's performance is excellent, with a good audience that gets better as the evening proceeds. At the curtain call, Julian and I exchange happy but qualified smiles; if only Vincent Canby, of the *Times*, had been in front, but he's chosen to come the following night.

On Saturday, I return to the theatre just in time to go round the dressing rooms before the evening performance. Everyone seems to know the *Times* will be in front. Gerry and Paul have already left for the stage, so I follow them down to wish them well. I find them in the shadowy set, Gerry sitting on his chair, Paul pacing back and forth to one side, each alone with his thoughts. The memory of this moment of waiting comes back to me with a rush, and I feel an immense sympathy for them, and for the necessary innocence of all performers, who must believe that a random sample of their own species have gathered out there in their hundreds with good will in their hearts. More prudent men than actors know that a hanging also attracts a crowd.

TUESDAY, MARCH 7TH

At midafternoon on Monday, Julian rings; he's heard from the press-department people, who've heard on the grapevine the gist of some of the notices, and they're very mixed. Julian's tone is sombre but not downcast.

"Does this mean we come off next Saturday?" I ask.

"No, I've spoken to Jean. We intend to fight." But I find myself thinking hard how I can raise some money to tide me over until the Frayn play, in June. If that doesn't work, I'll have to start selling things.

I make the rounds of the dressing rooms with a willed cheerfulness. In the foyer I wonder if word of the bad press has already spread to our audience and I tuck myself away out of sight in the back row. The show begins. We have an audience packed with celebrities, and their response reflects it—rather cold and watchful with patches of "encouraging" laughter.

At intermission, I escape to the backstage corridor to avoid friends and famous faces. Julian joins me. He's resilient in adversity, and I admire him for it. We're standing side by side, both staring at the wall. "Look, we did our best," he says. "You and I couldn't have worked harder. And there's still a chance."

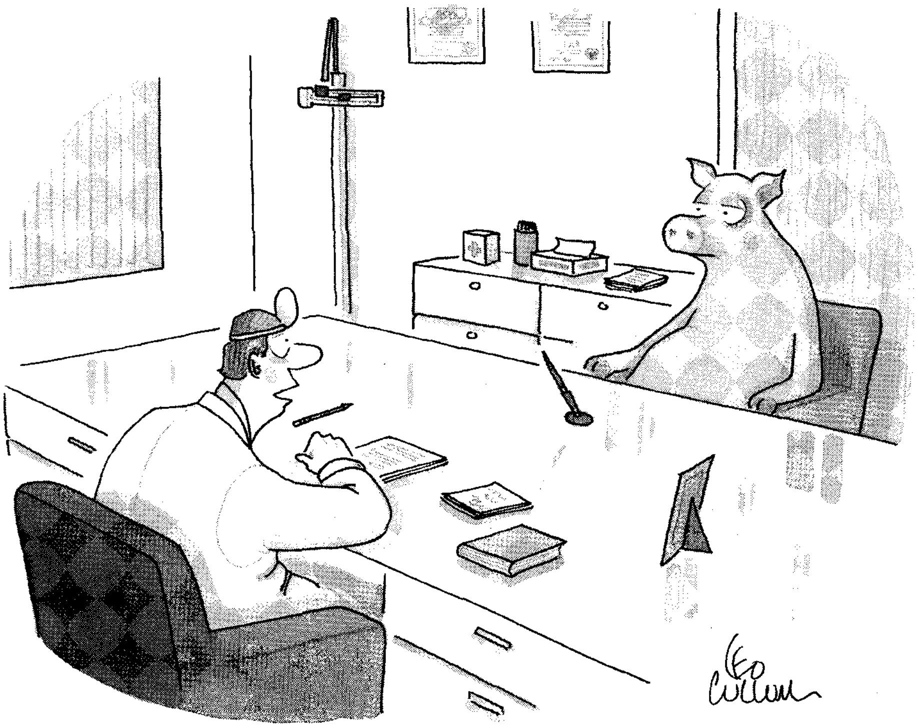
"What, if the *Times* gives us a rave?" I say.

"There's always a chance," says Julian.

I go back to my seat for Woody's play. The audience has become more unbuttoned, and Debra and Linda get it off to a terrific start. One by one they're joined by other members of the cast, and no one drops the ball. The reception at the end is enthusiastic.

Afterward, my English agent, Bernard Hunter, and I go by taxi to the party. He thinks it's gone well, but all I want to do is go home to bed. I'm sweating uncomfortably and dread the prospect of all the names I'm not going to be able to remember, of the confidence I'm not going to be able to project. However, I'm soon surrounded by people insisting that they enjoyed it. I allow myself one glass of red wine, pick up a plate the size of a small saucer, pile a few square inches of food on it (this is Off Broadway, after all), and join Cy Coleman at his table. Jerry Schoenfeld approaches like a cardinal dispensing blessings, and shakes me by the hand. He makes a whispered suggestion about lunch next time I'm in New York, then drifts off. Someone else—how can I have forgotten who?—comes up to me and says, "The New York *Times*, it's a rave! An absolute rave!" A few moments later, Jerry's there again, pumping my hand like an action replay. "I came back to be the first to tell you, the New York *Times* is a rave."

I'm beginning to feel like a hilltop from which the clouds are lifting after a month of rain. Can that actually be sunlight making me blink? Across the room, Julian is edging through the crowd toward me, wearing on his face the suppressed smile of a bank robber who has the money in his briefcase and is already on the plane to Tahiti. ♦



"In my practice, I prefer to treat the whole hog."

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

DIARY OF A MURDER

A year after a young woman at Harvard killed her roommate and then took her own life, questions remain about why it happened, and whether it had to.

BY MELANIE THERNSTROM

HARVARD'S commencement is among the most festive in the land. By the first week of June, new grass has been patched on to the square of lawn between Widener Library and Memorial Church. World eminences are invited to speak, and they come—Mother Teresa, Colin Powell, Václav Havel. As the seniors are welcomed to the company of educated men and women, their parents clap and cry. The most touching sight is the immigrant parents: you can see in their faces that everything they journeyed to this country for has been accomplished in a moment.

There is talk this year of what should be said about two girls who will not be graduating with their class—Sinedu Tadesse and Trang Ho. It is a year this week since they died, but their deaths still have the quality of hushed taboo they had from the start. On the morning of Sunday, May 28, 1995, Sinedu Tadesse, a junior from Ethiopia, stabbed her roommate of two years, a Vietnamese junior named Trang Ho, forty-five times while Trang lay sleeping in her bed. By the time the police came, Sinedu had hanged herself in the bathroom, and both girls were dead.

Within a day, dozens of local and national reporters had descended on the campus. The last comparable crime at Harvard had occurred in 1849. "The questions were endless," *Newsweek* wrote. "Could Harvard have intervened? Why did Tadesse snap? Were there unseen warning signs? Why does evil exist?" The headline in the *Times* called it "A PUZZLE WHOSE CENTRAL PIECE MAY NEVER BE FOUND."

It's a puzzle that the university would prefer forgotten. In a letter to Harvard parents Dean Harry Lewis concluded, "Although several news articles have speculated on what might have caused Ms. Tadesse to act as she did, it seems unlikely that we will ever have an adequate understanding of the event."

A peculiar discourse developed on campus, in which the girls were referred to in one breath, as if their deaths had been the result of some unfathomable blood pact about which no one could say who was to blame or where the evil lay. In a campus memorial service shortly after the deaths, in which neither girl was mentioned by name, the Reverend Peter Gomes, the university's minister, said only, "For all that was good in these girls, Lord bless them; for the forces of evil beyond their control which overcame them, Lord forgive them."

Media accounts make them sound like twins: nice, polite, petite, hardworking foreign-born premed junior biology majors. "They certainly seemed well matched," the *Times* wrote. "Both had risen from humble circumstances . . . both women dreamed of becoming doctors so they could help others. Both hewed to the family-centered traditions of their homelands, and both were valedictorians of their high-school graduating classes." On campus, their deaths are seen as wrapped in the mythology of their resident dormitory, Dunster House. Old and beautiful, situated on the north bank of the Charles River, Dunster has an aura of gloom about it, and it had been connected with two suicides earlier that spring.

A fierce debate took place on campus about whether Harvard should establish a scholarship in the name of both girls or only in Trang's—a debate reflecting a macabre kind of political correctness. There is a confused sense that, as Diep Nguyen, who was then the co-president of the Harvard Vietnamese Association and a friend of Trang's, has put it, "we do feel that in some way we don't understand Sinedu is a victim as well—we're not blaming anyone."

Sinedu would certainly be pleased by the confusion. A kindred spirit—an exclusive other—was something she seems to have once believed she had found in Trang. Sinedu's reality has prevailed, linking the two through death into a common fate. In memory they are bonded in a way that Trang has no say in—and that they never were in life.

SINEDU had come to see me during the crowded first few days of the 1993 spring term, when she was a freshman. I had spent the preceding several days reading a hundred applications in order to choose a dozen students for a seminar on autobiographical writing I was teaching in the English Department. The list of successful applicants had been posted on the door.

"I saw that I wasn't on the list," Sinedu said to me. She was small, light-skinned, with large, heavy-lidded eyes and an air of nervous decorum. I tried to recall her sample: it had made no impression. Creative-writing classes were competitive—in order to take a class to learn you had to prove your ability.

"In Ethiopia, where I come from, I have seen terrible violence and poverty and things no one would understand," she told me, leaning forward slightly, her voice low and self-dramatizing. I suggested that she apply again, another year.

In rethinking the brief incident, as I did often after her death, I wonder why I hadn't been drawn to help her. Instead, I became one in a long line of people whom Sinedu Tadesse reached out to, and who did not respond to her. Her death accomplished what she had never succeeded at in life: people were finally interested in her story.

ADDIS ABABA, where Sinedu grew up, is the capital of the third-poorest country in the world. The streets are choked with livestock, prostitutes, beggars with babies, and malnourished children trying to sell shoestrings in the mud of the rainy season. Coffins are stacked up for sale by the roadside, next to stands selling fruit. But the low red-and-white gates of the International Community School (formerly the American School) open to a compound of pretty, airy buildings. When, last May, a student heard the news on CNN at the Addis Ababa Hilton and brought word to the school, teachers and students who had known Sinedu spent the day crying and talking in small groups.

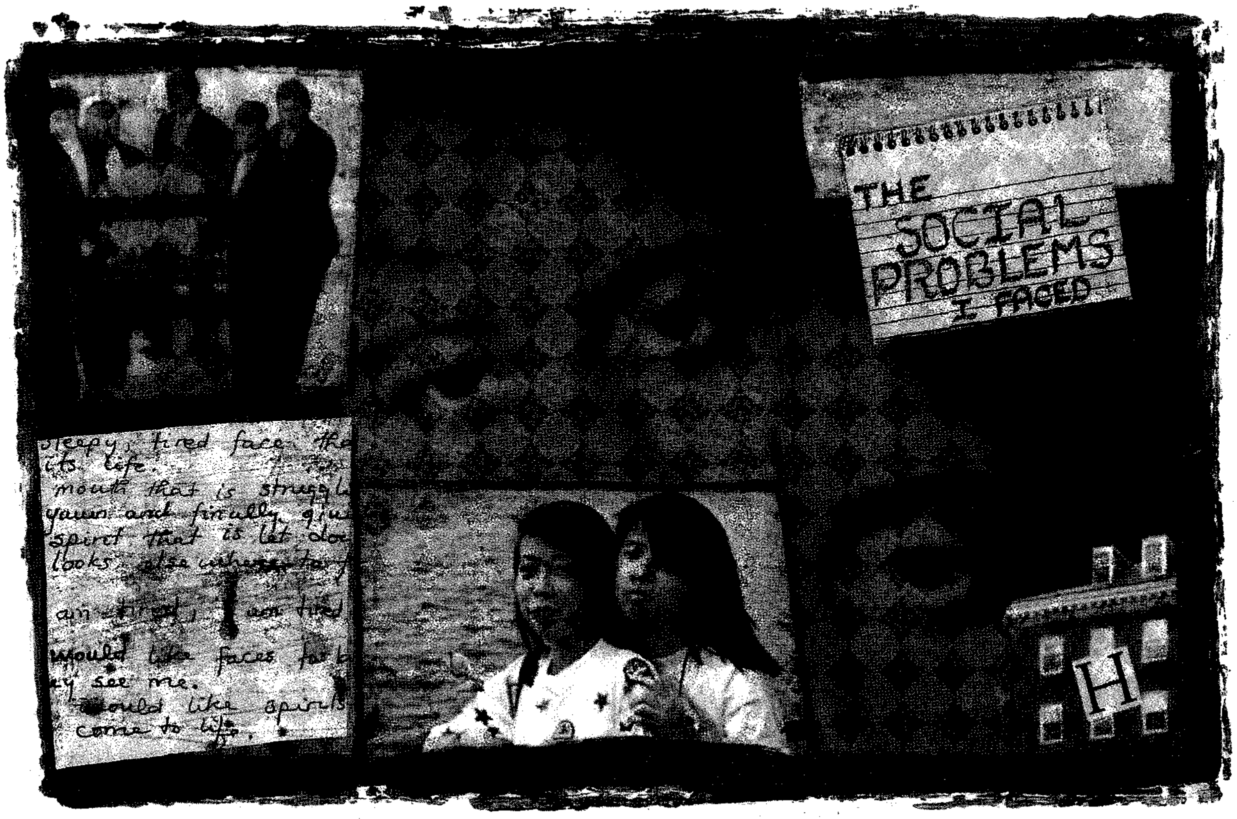
Sinedu had been one of a select number of Ethiopian scholarship students whom the International Community School (I.C.S.) accepted as part of an agreement the school made with the Ethiopian government. In the country's public schools, students often sit on dirt floors, as many as a hundred to a class, without books or supplies. Sinedu attended a Catholic girls' school. In the eighth grade, she, along with the best students from eighty other schools, took competitive exams in English, and was one of six students to be selected for I.C.S. Four years later, she emerged from I.C.S. with a full scholarship to the world's richest, most famous university. She would return home a doctor in a country that currently has one doctor for every thirty-five thousand people, and in which the average Ethiopian earns a hundred dollars a year.

The Tadesse family were members of the Amhara ruling élite, which lost its standing when the Communist regime, the Derg, came to power, shortly before Sinedu was born. In 1977, when Sinedu was two, the Red Terror began; it continued through the late nineteen-seventies, during which some thirty thousand people were killed and vast numbers of others tortured and imprisoned, especially among the educated élite. In 1982, Sinedu's father, Tadesse Zelleke, an administrator of several government schools, was imprisoned without trial for two years on suspicion of subversive sentiments. The family did not know whether he would ever be released. Sinedu's mother, Atsede, had a job as a nurse in a government hospital to keep the family from starving. Over the next year, more than half a million Ethiopians died of famine.

Throughout it all, Sinedu studied. Her teachers at I.C.S. talk about her more with admiration than with fondness. Maura McMillin, her English teacher, recalls, "She was quiet and demure, academically focussed to the point of tunnel vision. She was one of those little academic machines. I never remember her laughing or goofing off—I think it would have gotten in the way." Sinedu's guidance counsellor, Patrick Dyer, remembers her as just "a quiet young lady with a monumental task in front of her," and he observes, "You couldn't tell her that academics weren't everything, because they were. They were her ticket out."

In her high-school yearbook entry she affirmed "friendship is one of life's most precious treasures," but it seems to have been a treasure that eluded her. In her class, of twenty-nine—many the children of diplomats and wealthy Europeans—the other students led a Western-style social life, while Sinedu kept largely to herself. Classmates recall her as a serious, plain-looking girl. During her junior year, the regime fell, and many of the diplomats' children were evacuated. Sinedu, who had never been out of the country, kept focussed on her college applications. The day she was accepted by Harvard (she was also accepted by twenty-three other colleges) was the happiest day of her life.

The fulfillment of Sinedu's ambitions, however, didn't bring much joy. At Harvard, she felt isolated; she found the weather cold and the work difficult. The



Trang, pictured to the right of Thao Nguyen, seems to have had no idea of the magnitude of the role she played in Sinedu's psyche.

STEVEN DANA

reinforcement she had always received through her academic performance failed her. She struggled for B's and worried that she wouldn't get into a good medical school, at a time of intense competition for admission. She was bewildered by American standards; in one of a series of diaries she kept while she was at Harvard, she wrote herself this note: "Copying from one text is plaigerysm [sic], while copying from different (several) texts is RESEARCH."

Nebiyeleul (Neb) Tilahun, a brilliant, popular student who was the other member of Sinedu's class at I.C.S. to go to Harvard told me that although he knew Sinedu so well he had memorized her ID number, he had never realized that she was particularly unhappy. "She gave the impression of being able to handle everything perfectly," he said. "She was calm, calculated, composed, and controlled at all times. Anyway, happiness is not an Ethiopian value. Ethiopians are supposed to be responsible—that is the highest value." Although her diaries reveal desperate loneliness, she didn't seem to know how to convey the fact that she was looking for friends. After the murder and suicide, newspaper accounts included reports from students that she was always looking down and would never make eye contact. But Misrak Assefa, a family friend, told me, with some indignation, "That's the way Ethiopian girls are *supposed* to be." The self-analytic, confessional style—the exchange of self-revelation as a currency of friendship—is a cultural discourse that many Ethiopians find it difficult to participate in.

Third World students at Harvard tend to be much more cosmopolitan than Sinedu was. Shugu Imam, the daughter of a prominent Pakistani family (her mother was the Pakistani Ambassador to the United States), says, "I'm not surprised Sinedu didn't have any friends. She was not a compelling personality. When you're a foreign student, you have to come to terms with the fact that people aren't interested in your culture. You have to learn American politics—read *Vanity Fair.* The African friends I had who were socially successful were well travelled, from fabulously wealthy or glamorous backgrounds, and the women were pretty and knew how to exoticize themselves."

Sinedu kept spiral notebooks—"My Small Book of Social Rules," "The Social Problems I Faced"—in which, addressing herself in the second person or in a question-and-answer format, she wrote out nearly a hundred numbered instructions on problems such as what to discuss with other students in the dining hall—a problem she resolved to master by treating it as an extra class:

> Baby, I got a great idea. Remember that this is your fifth course. Every morning when you wake up you have to come up w/three fat topics of conversation . . . This is always your GREATEST problem. So deal w/it properly. I know this is going to be very difficult. But it cannot be more than the effort you put into one of your class. . . . DO IT! DO IT! DO IT!
>
> Remember this is one of your classes and for every three questions you turn in you get a grade.

The early entries seem to reflect ordinary anxieties of a college student and a foreigner, but they grow increasingly paranoid and dissociated:

> Do not show off what you really think. Put on a mask. . . .
>
> Do not smile when you do not need to smile. If you are talking about something serious, make your face serious. If you want to threaten, put away your smile, and look ominous. If you are sorry, make your face look sorrowful. But do not, DO NOT smile when you don't need to smile.

She also made cassette tapes, trying to analyze her problems and give herself encouragement. But she was painfully aware that her attempts at self-cure—treating human relations as homework—only seemed to crystallize her alienation, and in the summer after her freshman year she wrote a letter to a stranger at the law school. She begins by explaining that she had picked the name out of the phone book, that she was a freshman at Harvard College, and that she was from Ethiopia. It is an astonishing document:

> Why am I writing this letter? Because I am desperate. . . . As far as I can remember, my life has been hellish. . . . Year after year, I became lonelier and lonelier.
>
> When I am with a group of people, I keep so quiet (I have nothing to say) that I send the chills through those who notice me. Then I cry when people forget about me, or dislike being with me. When I am with one person, I shake with nervousness fearing that we will run out of things to say or she or he will be bored. For math I had a teacher; for painting I had a teacher; for social life I had no one. . . .
>
> I am like a person who can't swim chocking [sic] for life in a river. . . . All you have to do is give me a hand and put into words what you already know. No expenses, commitments or risks involved. You can say no at any minute. All it takes is a few hours from your week and some energy . . . please do not close the door in my face. Even if you are not interested, please give this letter to a friend or relative who might be.

The letter was forwarded to a dean and then placed in Sinedu's file.

In the spring of her freshman year, however, Sinedu had seen an opportunity. She had met Trang Ho in a science

"So, how goes the quest for fire?"

class and had become friendly with her, and in March—after Sinedu's freshman roommate had rejected her, close to the time rooming decisions were due—Trang agreed to share a suite with her. (Tension had arisen between Trang and her freshman roommate because her roommate's boyfriend often slept over.) Sinedu's diary entry dated March 8, 1993, reads:

> The last four days were the highlight of my life thus far in Harvard . . . my rooming problem was solved in the best possible way saving my face & also w/a girl I thought I would really enjoy to be with, with a girl I would make the queen of my life. I could just see myself raising my head proudly whenever people ask me who I'm rooming with. I could see myself . . . working hard to improve my life so as not to spoil the beautiful chance I'm given.

But she adds:

> You know what I fear? I fear that shitty cringing feeling that accompanies me . . . should my rooming thing does [sic] not work out in a way that makes me hold my head high & speak of it proudly.

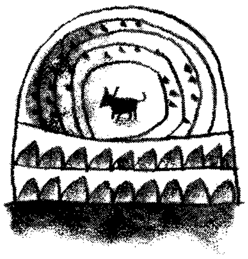
When she went home from college, for the only time, she told her father she had found a best friend.

TRANG seems to have had no idea of the magnitude of the role she played in her roommate's psyche. Her priority was always her family, which had been broken up almost a decade earlier and had become reunited less than a year before she entered Harvard.

Trang's father, Phuoc Xuan Ho, had fought in the South Vietnamese Army, and after the war both he and Mrs. Ho were sent to reëducation camps. Trang, a second daughter, had been born outside Saigon in 1974, five months before the city fell to the North Vietnamese. After Mr. Ho was released, the following year, the family made an abortive attempt to escape in a small fishing boat, during which Trang fell overboard and was rescued. In 1984, when Trang was ten, Mr. Ho made a second attempt. Under the cover of night, the family was to board a small boat, crammed with two hundred and sixty-five others, heading for Indonesia. His wife decided to stay behind with their youngest daughter and to rejoin them later. He took Trang and her older sister with him, cutting their hair so they looked like boys, to protect them from rape by pirates.

The first day at sea was calm, but after that it grew stormy. The boat was so crowded that they had to stand for seven days. Finally, they reached a refugee camp in Indonesia, where they spent almost a year. Each day, Mr. Ho gave the girls English words to learn—at first ten or twenty, then a hundred a day. In 1985, they arrived in San Diego, but a year later, after Mr. Ho heard about all the famous universities in the Boston area, he moved the family to Dorchester.

Trang took school in her new country very seriously. One night when she was stuck on her homework, she called 911. The dispatcher told her that someone would call her back, and when the phone rang a few minutes later her father picked it up to hear a policeman asking for the little girl who needed help with her homework.



All through high school, the family worked to bring over Trang's mother, Quy Thi Huynh, and the youngest daughter, Tram, with Trang writing to Senator Kennedy. But Mr. Ho was unable to sponsor them for financial reasons. Finally, in the fall of Trang's senior year, they arrived. Almost immediately, however, her parents began fighting bitterly, and they soon separated. Mrs. Ho accused her husband of abuse; at one point, she fled to a shelter for safety and filed for a restraining order. Mr. Ho moved back to San Diego, and Trang—who stayed close to both parents—became, in effect, the head of the household. Every weekend during college, Trang went home to teach her little sister English, translate documents for her mother, and help with the housework.

Trang, like Sinedu, has often been described as "quiet and studious"; but her teachers, unlike Sinedu's, stress the joy and excitement she felt at learning. Trang used her academic success to reach out to people, and all through high school she tutored classmates. One of her high-school teachers, Denise Traniello, recalls telling Trang that other students were using her to cheat by copying her work. "But she was too innocent," Traniello says. "She'd never see it." Trang dreamed that being a pediatrician would unite all her goals. Her application essay to Harvard, concerning the plight of the boat people, had concluded, "I will never forget the fact that I was a refugee, nor will I ever forget that I am one of the leaders of the future who will make significant differences." When she was a freshman, *Boston Magazine* chose her, along with Governor Weld and other luminaries, as one of "25 WHO CAN SAVE BOSTON." She was presented as the final entry: the hope of the next generation.

"She was spunky," her friend Khoi Luu says. He particularly admired the way "she never shared her pain with anyone," he says, adding, "She was able to laugh a lot. I think people who have a lot of pain appreciate laughter." Adjustment to Harvard was difficult, but by the beginning of her sophomore year she had established a group of friends and was flourishing. She wasn't an academic star, but she did well and didn't seem unduly anxious about her grades. She was always struggling to be upbeat. Cards to her friends urged them "Never give up!" and "Smile!"

THE great hopes Sinedu had held for her relationship with Trang dissolved immediately. Not only did Trang leave Sinedu alone every weekend to go home to her family but she already had a best friend—Thao Nguyen. Sinedu was jealous of Thao, and sometimes neglected to give Trang her telephone messages.

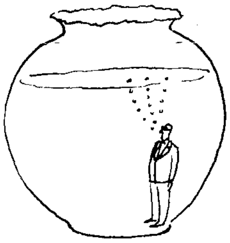
A month into their sophomore year, Sinedu wrote the following entry in her diary:

> On the way to depression & battered w/pessimistic thoughts . . . I am unlovable and a cuckoo . . . Trang told me I am boring . . . I felt like I'm boring her. . . . If I ever grow desperate enough to seek power & a fearful respect through killing, she would be the first one I would blow off . . . You know what annoys me the most that situations would never reverse for me to be the strong & her to be the weak. She'll live on tucked in the warmth & support of her family while I cry alone in the cold . . . The bad way out I see is suicide & the good way out killing, savoring their fear & [then] suicide. But you know what annoys me the most, I do nothing.

Over the course of the next two years, through hundreds of pages, her diaries trace the labyrinthine process in which "the good way out" becomes the only way. In the spring of their junior year, Sinedu's hostility became evident to Trang. Where once she had been compulsively neat (something Trang was not), she started to be aggressively messy, leaving fruit in the room to rot. Trang told her sister she had asked Dunster House officials to change rooms, but the request was denied. Trang's sister and mother asked if they should attempt to intervene on her behalf, but she said no, she would make it through the year. At the end of March, with the deadline for housing decisions approaching, Trang told Sinedu she would be living with two other girls the next year.

Sinedu was devastated. She begged Trang to change her mind, following her out onto the streets and into the subway. Trang recoiled; she told her friend Thao she felt that Sinedu's pleading revealed a lack of self-respect. Trang's sister, whose name was also Thao, recalls that Sinedu wrote Trang a letter asking her to reconsider, declaring plaintively that Trang would always have a family to go to but Sinedu had no one, and concluding that if Trang changed her mind about their friendship she should give her a call—a request that Trang found odd, since they lived together. Trang became anxious about her decision. Whenever Trang thought she was hurting someone she would come to her friend Thao and ask "Am I a bad girl? Am I ugly?" and Thao would reassure her. She did so now, telling her that it was all right to change roommates. And so Sinedu was left "to float"—to be randomly placed in a room by the Dunster House Office. In a school where most people choose their roommates, a kind of failure is associated with floating: the sense that nobody wants to live with you.

Trang tried to pacify Sinedu, writing her a letter saying, "I respect you so you should respect my decision. Furthermore, your actions about what happened really hurt me. . . . If I had neither care [sic] nor think of you as a friend, it would not have hurt me," and ending, "Despite what happened, I hope that we can still be friends." But Sinedu stopped speaking to her. One night when Trang forgot her key, Sinedu refused to let her into the room.



In the world of Sinedu's diaries, Trang was Sinedu's only emotional resource. In reality, however, Sinedu had Neb, a brother studying in the United States, and cousins in the Boston area—all of whom are bewildered she did not confide in them. Instead, she withdrew from them.

In the wake of the tragedy, Harvard officials said that Sinedu never indicated that she needed any help, an assertion that was widely repeated in the press reports. In fact, Sinedu had been seeing a therapist—Douglas Powell, at the University Mental Health Services—since her freshman year. Dr. Powell told me that he was under a gag order and wouldn't comment, and referred me to Dr. Randolf Catlin, the chief of Harvard's Mental Health Services, who spoke about such cases in general terms. Dr. Catlin told me, "If your self-esteem is narrowly based, it becomes terribly important to feel there is one person who cares about you. . . . If you take that person's rejection as clear evidence that you as a person are not valuable, that might make you enormously angry. A primitive response to this is that you might want to destroy that person or yourself or both."

When Sinedu decided to die, she seems to have set about planning it in the same methodical fashion in which she had always conducted her life. Two weeks before the end of the semester, she packed up her computer, meticulously, in its original packaging and sent it to one of her cousins. She acquired two knives and a length of nylon rope. For the first time in months, she called her friend Neb, inviting him to brunch on Sunday, May 21st—a week before she died.

When she arrived, her appearance was transformed. She was wearing makeup, high patent-leather heels, and shorts—"a change from her Ethiopian self, where wearing shorts is considered disrespectful," Neb noted. "There was a profound change in the way she looked and moved and carried herself," he told me. "There was an air of happiness or contentment about her. She seemed lighter."

This was the happiest he had ever seen her. He is certain now that she was saying goodbye. After her death, he found himself particularly disturbed by the memory. But when suicidal patients finally make up their mind to die "all of a sudden they may become cheerful," Dr. Catlin told me. "They've solved their problem."

In the following week, Sinedu turned in the final work for one course (for which she received an A) and then became unable to study. Students report having seen her in the library, "distracted" and with "a glazed look." She requested medical excuses for her other exams. Instead of studying, she composed a letter, which she never sent, to one of Trang's friends about Trang's betrayal, "the rooming chaos," as she put it. "That incident led to so much evil b/n us & ever since then rooming with her was like burning in hell," she wrote. She also sent a photograph of herself to the *Harvard Crimson*, the daily student newspaper, with an anonymous note inside that read, "KEEP this picture. There will soon be a very juicy story involving the person in this picture."

The attempt to manipulate the publicity attendant on her own death is one of the most striking aspects of the story. The photograph she picked didn't look much like her—it was a glamorous, touched-up professional shot from high school—but she had accurately anticipated the way in which when someone dies a single photograph becomes emblematic. The *Crimson* editors had no idea what to make of the anonymous letter. The letter kicked around the office for a few days before it was discarded. The police later retrieved it from a Dumpster.

On Friday, May 26th, Thao Nguyen came to spend the weekend with Trang. Trang was taking her final exam on Saturday, and afterward Thao was to help her move home for the summer. Thao, a lovely, ethereal-looking woman, then twenty-nine and teaching in Lowell, Massachusetts, had emigrated to America only two years earlier. Trang had become her first friend in America, taking her shopping and insisting that they both speak English to help Thao learn.

While Trang and Thao were packing, they came across a traditional Ethiopian dress. Trang told Thao that Sinedu had brought it for her from her trip home, and then said, a little wistfully, that all that was over now. Trang and Sinedu's suite consisted of two small, dark, low-ceilinged rooms. Like most Dunster House doubles, it had originally been built for one occupant—a setup that quickly becomes unbearable when relationships fracture. Every time Trang wanted to go out she had to walk through Sinedu's room, and every time Sinedu wanted to go to the bathroom she had to walk through Trang's.

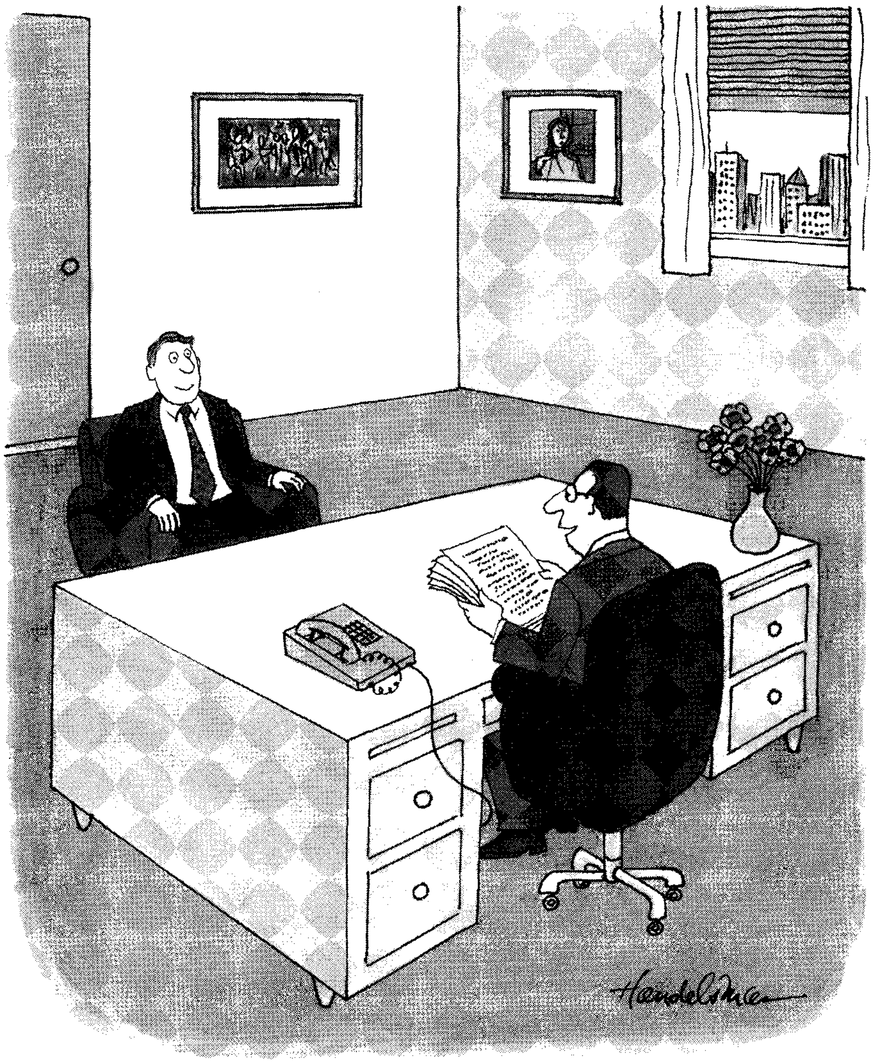
At ten on Saturday morning, Trang went out to study for her afternoon exam in physics—a course that Sinedu was also taking. When she left, she saw Sinedu hunched on the bed in a fetal position, her knees up, her hands holding her head, crying. When Trang came back at noon, Sinedu was still in the same position. Thao told Trang that she should ask Sinedu what was wrong. Trang felt uncomfortable, saying that they hadn't talked in two months, but she opened the door and asked Sinedu if she was O.K. Sinedu silently waved her away. Then Trang went out to take the exam. When she came back, between five and six, Sinedu was gone. Trang said, "Wow, I'm done," and she and Thao went out to celebrate.

No one is sure how Sinedu spent her final afternoon or evening. Trang had no idea that Sinedu had not taken her exam. Around 7 P.M., Sinedu asked the house superintendent to let her into the Dunster House weight room—a place no one recalls her having visited before. At some point, she spoke to her brother on the phone, and she told him she was fine but worn out from exams and had diarrhea.

Trang and Thao watched a video that evening in a friend's room, about two sisters who were in love with the same man. Thao asked Trang what she would do in such a situation, but Trang didn't understand the conflict: she couldn't imagine a man being more important to her than either of her sisters. When they came in, at two in the morning, they saw Sinedu lying on the bed face down, with the light on. They went to bed, sharing Trang's bed, as Trang did with her little sister, Tram, at home. (Thao was dismayed when this fact was later misinterpreted: in Southeast Asia, she explains, women often share beds and are physically affectionate.) They talked for another hour or two: Thao told Trang more about herself and her past in Vietnam—things she said she had never told anyone before. After Trang closed her eyes, Thao stared at Trang's face for a long time—her skin pale with exhaustion, but her face relaxed, her worries drained away. Then she turned so that they could sleep head to toe in the narrow bed.

Sometime before eight in the morning, an alarm went off, but Trang told Thao that it was Sinedu's, and they should go back to sleep. Sinedu was already in the bathroom. Thao heard the sound of water running and fell asleep again. She awoke to see Sinedu standing over Trang, stabbing her silently with a knife, her expression glazed and fixed—intent, Thao recalls, "like she really knew what she was doing." Trang held up her hands to try to block the knife but was unable to cry out.

Thao tried to grab the knife, but Sinedu pulled it away, slicing open Thao's hand. One of her feet, next to Trang's head, got cut as well. Bleeding heavily, Thao ran out of the room. She heard the heavy self-locking door click behind her and realized, with horror, that she would never be able to get back in. It was, she says, the worst moment of her life. Frantically, she began banging on other doors in the hall, but no one woke up. She stumbled out into the courtyard, where a lone student was sitting in the sun, eating his breakfast and waiting for others to wake up. When the police arrived, they found the door to the suite barricaded. Sinedu had pushed a heavy desk against it from the inside. When they got in, they found Trang's body on the floor in Sinedu's room. Apparently, Trang had stumbled into Sinedu's room, then collapsed onto the floor. She had forty-five stab wounds. Sinedu was hanging in the bathroom from a length of rope. Police believed that the noose had been set up ahead of time, for it was cut to the right length and the coil had been neatly replaced in a cabinet. Paramed-



"Very nice résumé. Leave a sample of your DNA with my secretary."

ics came and attempted to resuscitate Sinedu, but she was pronounced dead.

COULD anything have been done to prevent the tragedy? That is a question that's often been asked in the aftermath. The discussion is one in which Harvard is reluctant to participate. Everything about Harvard depends on its reputation, and it is orchestrated with great care. The tragedy was the climax of a bad year for the public-relations office: two recent graduates pleading guilty to stealing a hundred and twenty-seven thousand dollars from a Harvard-based cancer charity; President Neil Rudenstine's taking leave for exhaustion; Gina Grant, the high-school senior whose acceptance was rescinded when the university learned she had killed her mother. Doubtless on legal advice, the university, which has eleven in-house lawyers, adopted a policy of spin control, which meant that many people were extremely reluctant to talk to me. I found myself seeing another side of a place I thought I knew so well. (I came from a Harvard family: my parents and my brother were educated there; my father is a member of the faculty, and my mother has been as well; I graduated from Dunster House, in 1987, and returned to teach in the English Department in 1993; I had firsthand experience with some of the doctors at the University Health Services, and knew other people at Harvard whom I wanted to interview—all of which led to feelings of distressed loyalty.)

Several tutors told me that the Master of Dunster House, Karel Liem, had cautioned them not to speak to the press, and one of them called me in tears and asked to take back her interview lest she be fired. "In a case of this complexity we prefer to centralize information," the undergraduate dean, Fred Jewett, explained to me. "Everyone's looking for a villain, and we don't want to be it."

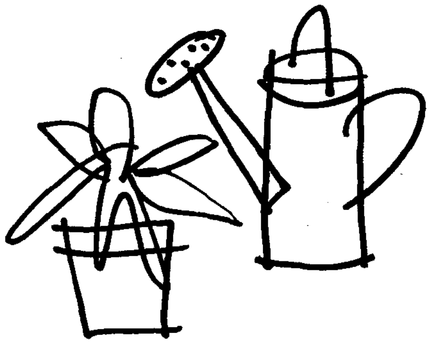
Dean Harry Lewis's letter to Harvard parents about the deaths assured them that "neither student was living outside the College's carefully woven advising system. Indeed, both students were in close contact with their academic advisor and seemed to be managing the ups and downs of college life. . . . We feel confident . . . that we are organized in a way to provide the necessary support."

Karel Liem, a professor of biology, had been an academic adviser to both girls. He told the press that he had a meeting with Sinedu shortly before she died in which she told him she was fine. As for what her problems were, he has said, "I only wish I knew." At hand, however, in her file, was the letter sent to the law-school student, which, police reports note, two Harvard officials who knew Sinedu had read but never discussed with her.

It is clear now that what she needed was clinical intervention. Mental-health services at Harvard, however, are limited. Students often complain that an appointment is hard to get, and long-term, open-ended therapy is unavailable. Students who need such therapy are referred outside—at which point, intimidated by cost and lack of transportation, many give up. Dr. Elizabeth Aub Reid, the former director of consultation and liaison, acknowledges that mental-health services generally have been under increasing financial pressure, because they "are very expensive and results are hard to quantify."

One friend, who knew that Sinedu had been seeing Dr. Powell since freshman year, said that Powell had been trying to reach her to cancel an appointment for the Monday after she died. It is hard to imagine how he could have failed to perceive her distress. When I asked Dr. Catlin why her therapy had been so ineffective, he offered several explanations. In part, he says, Dr. Powell didn't know Sinedu very well, because he saw her only on the limited basis that the system encourages. Also, the Mental Health Services are accustomed to dealing with ordinary neurotic problems of adjustment, rather than psychotic breakdowns. "Sinedu was being seen because she wanted help learning how to relate to people, to be a better student at Harvard," Dr. Catlin told me.

IN Ethiopia, two common explanations are offered for Sinedu's fate. One is the whispered accusation that she was a lesbian, and therefore did the right thing to kill herself and the object of her shame. The evils of uncontrolled female sexuality are felt deeply in Ethiopian society. Some ninety per cent of Ethiopian women are subjected to genital mutilation as children, and—as a result of recent educational campaigns—often have the additional trauma of learning as adults that their bodies have been disfigured, and that cosmopolitan, and especially Western, men may reject them. Sinedu's diaries, however, provide no direct mention of sexuality. "I will die of loneliness if I don't have a husband and children & I would break down with guilt & anguish if I do," she writes elliptically. She also alludes to an unspecified childhood trauma.



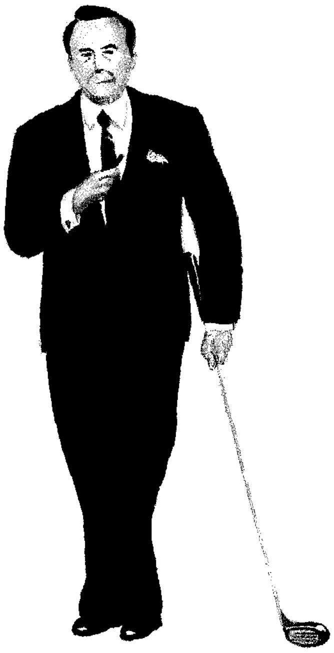
The other explanation prevalent in Ethiopia is that Sinedu was possessed by spirits. Unlike lesbianism, for which one is held responsible, possession by spirits is regarded as a kind of casualty of living in the States, because in Ethiopia it is perfectly curable. One of Sinedu's Ethiopian relatives explained to me that if Sinedu had stayed in Ethiopia, nothing like this would ever have happened, for as soon as she started feeling bad the family would have brought her to the holy waters. "In America, you have psychologists," she said, "but they don't have any special powers, do they?"

People are cured of spirit possession every week in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to which Sinedu's family belongs. The religion dates to the fourth century, and in its practice of Christianity the Devil plays a central role. "The Devil came between us," the Amhara say when they've quarrelled. In one form of spirit possession, the victims' souls are gradually replaced by spirits of a foreign, evil nature, which leads the victims to do things more and more unlike themselves until they are finally delivered, through suicide, into the hands of the Devil—symptoms that perfectly fit the case of Sinedu, a good girl from a good family.

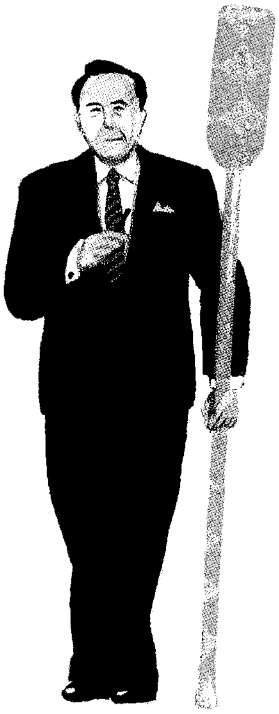
Although suicide is extremely rare in Ethiopia, suicide rates are high among Ethiopians who emigrate to other countries, such as the United States and Israel. A cousin of Sinedu's explained to me that Ethiopian lives are like threads woven in a tapestry of suffering. People always want to leave, but when you pluck the thread of their selfhood it loses all meaning. She makes a pulling gesture

OUTSIDER ACTIVEWEAR

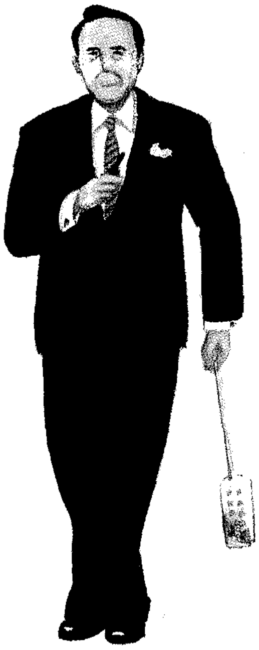
Bob Dole Models His '96 Kansas Kasuals Summer Collection



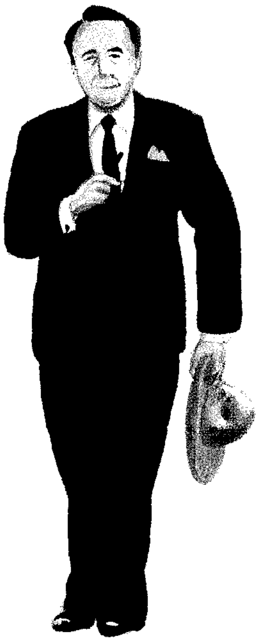
GOLF TOGS *Got time now to play golf. Good Republican game, and Bob Dole's a good Republican. Fancy not Bob Dole's style. Father taught neatness. Should be more neatness, my opinion.*



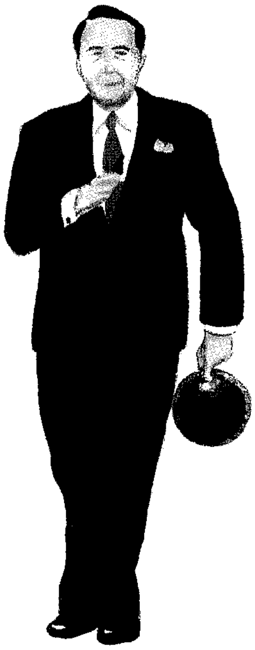
BOATING GEAR *We Doles, poor, hardworking Kansans, no time to go boating on weekends. No lakes. Sailing's for Kennedys. But say I got invited on the Archer-Daniels-Midland yacht, perfectly legal. Stay warm, stay dry. Goes from there.*



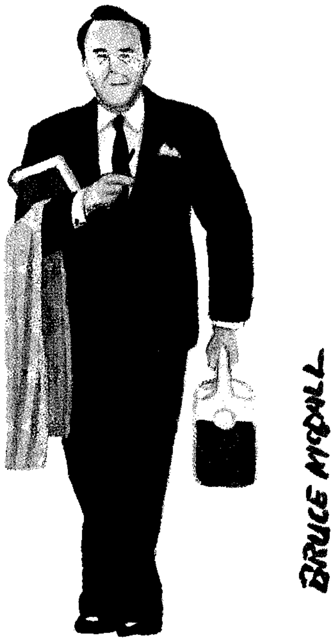
BARBECUE OUTFIT *Nothing wrong with a good fried hamburger, good Kansas beef. Dark colors hide stains. Fry up hamburgers, gonna get stains.*



SQUARE DANCE APPAREL *Good to let off steam, long as it doesn't get out of hand. Some of this other stuff nowadays, Bob Dole doesn't call that dancing. I'll take a wholesome square dance. Swing your partner, that kind of thing. Hard work, but never been afraid of hard work.*



BOWLING ATTIRE *Couldn't afford regular bowling alleys when I was a kid. Rolled cantaloupes at the chickens. Great American game. Learn a lot about democracy, bowling. Everybody takes turns. Bob Dole's bowling-attire rule, short and simple. Show the game respect.*



BEACHWEAR *Always did it the hard way. That's why Bob Dole favors stiff, heavy worsteds for the beach. Itchy as the devil, hotter than Kansas in a drought. Following in Dick Nixon's footsteps here. Proud to.*

with her fingers and then opens her hands to show me there is nothing there.

SINEDU is buried in the graveyard behind St. Michael's Church, in the outskirts of Addis Ababa, on a steeply sloping hillside where sheep and goats graze. Two thousand people attended her funeral—for, as one of her teachers explained, her death was a tragedy for the whole culture. Funerals are often a devastating expense in the life of an Ethiopian family. After the burial, as is traditional, all the guests were fed *nefro* (chickpeas with wheat) and coffee, and friends and relatives stayed with the family for weeks afterward, sleeping in a tent in the courtyard, and after two and a half months, when the marble headstone was ready, another ceremony was held. Church burials are not permitted for suicides because when the Devil tempted the soul to suicide he obtained it forever. But Sinedu's family, who believe that no one knew what had really happened to her, arranged to have her given such a burial.

By the time I visited Addis Ababa, Sinedu had been buried more than a month. I had trouble finding the Tadesses' house, for most of the street signs in Addis Ababa were taken down during the Derg regime, because no one wanted to be found, and the sense of secrecy has endured. It turned out to be a modest stone house with a central courtyard and surrounded, like many middle-class Ethiopian houses, by a high tin fence to keep out intruders. I stood outside staring at the wall in the rain for a long time before I rang the bell.

In a small living room with yellow stone walls, Sinedu's parents, her two sisters, and one of her brothers were gathered. Sinedu's father was recovering from a heart attack he'd suffered after his daughter's death; he looked weary and sick. He was retired now; Sinedu, as a doctor, would have supported the family. Cookies and orange Fanta were served with a pained hospitality. Sinedu's mother, in black mourning robes, wept silently throughout my visit. I tried to ask neutral questions about Sinedu, but they seemed puzzled by them. "Children have their wishes, and it was Sinedu's wish to be a doctor," her father said. "We supported her in that wish." Was she happy at Harvard? She never complained. She'd told them her roommate was "very friendly and coöperative."

Then Sinedu's father said, in a heavy, final voice, "I don't care whether a hundred psychologists or a thousand police detectives tell me, I know my daughter did not commit these crimes. The stories we read, we do not believe. Something no one yet knows must have happened. One day the truth will come to light. Who would know her if not her parents—her mother and I? We have been with her all her life. We ate from the same table." He stumbled, his voice breaking—unable to explain the cord of connection they felt, from which it was incomprehensible she could have willingly severed herself forever.

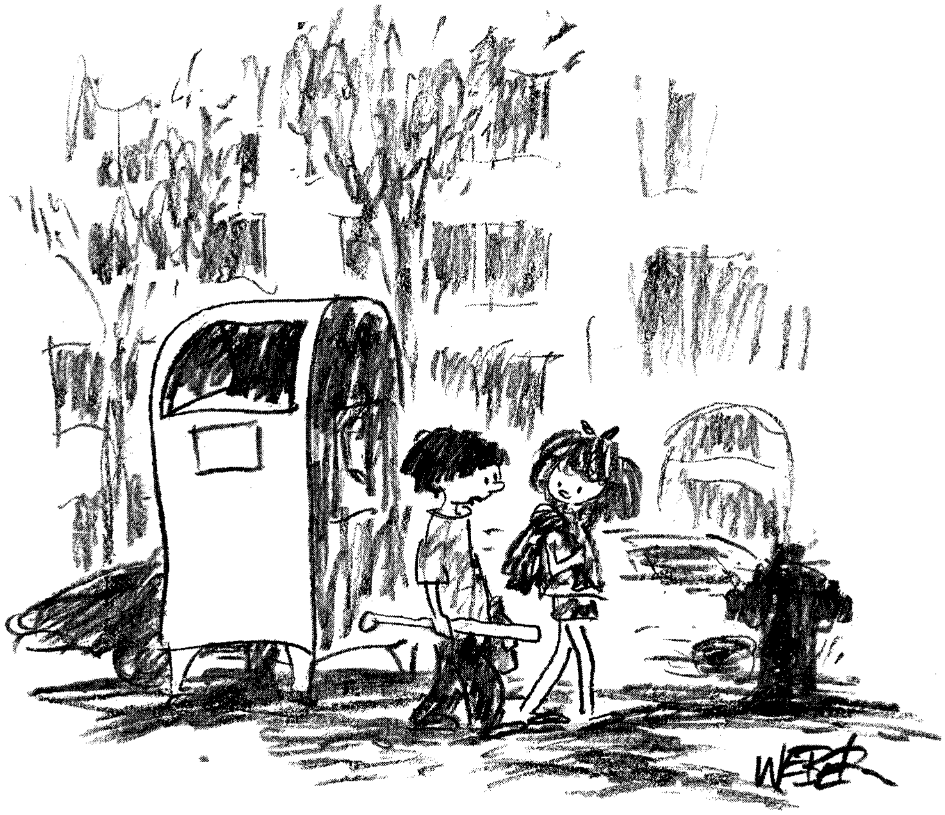
In her diary, Sinedu wrote:

> I don't understand what people mean by the warmth of a family, the love of their mother and the security of their home. I grew up feeling lonely & cold amidst two parents & four siblings. . . . I spent very limited time with other families that it took me all my life to figure out what they had & what I did not have. . . .
>
> There was a lot of emotional pain & trauma involved in my home life. My parents did not beat me or abuse me. They fed me, bought me clothes, sent me to good schools and wished the best for me. As a result I was unable to point at any tangible cause. . . .
>
> Do not get me wrong, I do not blame them for all they did; they did not know how else to be.

AT a Vietnamese Buddhist temple in Boston, there is a picture of Trang on a large table in one corner, along with photographs of others who have died. The temple was once a Catholic church; the altar has been replaced with a statue of the Buddha, but the stained-glass windows still depict the sufferings of Christ. The table is laden with plates of food that relatives bring the dead. There was a service every week for the first forty-nine days after Trang's death, to pray that her consciousness will be accepted for salvation by the Buddha and not be reborn on earth again.

At Trang's funeral, her father, Phuoc Xuan Ho, cried out in Vietnamese, "Don't go! Don't go!" and "Why did I work so hard for ten years and go through so much in the end just to bury my daughter?" Having Trang go to Harvard—"this beautiful place which was halfway heaven"—was everything her family had wanted and worked for, a family friend explained. "Harvard will always be in my heart," her father told me. "For me, it is the best place and the worst place, because it is the place where my daughter died."

For the people around her, Trang's death is one of a series of losses. It is part of the double meaning that America has always had for them: the country that promised Vietnam so much but instead entangled



"This summer, my parents are sending me to divorce camp."

them in years of violence; the safe haven they have never quite reached. Trang's father thinks that Vietnamese people have a special strength, because they have suffered so much—a thousand years under Chinese rule, and then the French, and then the war. They have kept their hope, he says, and each time they are reborn stronger.

Trang's mother is still in a deep depression. She has lost interest in sleeping and cooking and doing housework. She is afraid she did something wrong in another life to deserve to have a daughter die this way. She stays home alone all day, in a small walkup apartment, praying at a candlelit shrine for Trang. Trang would have been graduating and on her way to medical school in the fall, she said recently in Vietnamese, dissolving into tears.

A woman who attends the family's temple told me that Trang must have done something to Sinedu in another life. The Buddha is very fair; everything is a balancing out. Did Trang's parents do something wrong in their previous life, I asked, that they deserve to have their daughter die this way? No, no, she said impatiently. Life is suffering. Children die. Her parents need to accept that Trang spent all the time with them she had to spend.

Thao Ho has taken a leave of absence from Tufts, where she was studying biopsychology. She lives with her mother and works full time in a lab. She feels she has to stanch the flow of loss for her parents, but she does not know how. She has her own loss. "There is no one I talk to now," she says. "I have lost my best friend, my life companion, my sister."

Thao Nguyen is a member of the temple, too. She has had two operations to repair the nerves of her damaged hand; this summer, her doctor wants to do a skin graft over the gash that stretches across most of her tiny hand. She is haunted by self-reproach that she did not try a second time to get the knife from Sinedu. I tell her what one detective told me—that "Thao did an incredible job trying to save her friend and should be commended"—but she is unconvinced.

In Vietnamese culture, the spirits of the dead return in dreams. On the operating table, and then for months afterward in Thao's dreams, Trang was angry with her. Once, Thao dreamed she was climbing a mountain, carrying an unbearably heavy burden. She could see Trang ahead of her, across a stream, and she called to her and hurried to catch up. But when she reached Trang, and tried to give her the burden, Trang turned away from her, and she had to continue up the mountain alone.

In time, though, she had a different dream about Trang—a good dream. She was standing alone in a room, and Trang came up to her from behind and put her arms around her and said, "I know you're so lonely now that I'm leaving you," and Thao said, "Ya, I'm so lonely." Thao had always loved Trang's hands: she had looked for them in the coffin, but gloves had been put on them to cover the wounds. But now in the dream Thao took Trang's hand, and Trang's hands were smooth and whole again, and Thao knew that Trang loved and forgave her.

Thao cannot believe that Trang had ever done anything wrong, even in another life, because "she is so good." She says, "There is no one in the world who is perfect, but she is perfect." In Buddhist philosophy, people sometimes die to pay for bad deeds, but sometimes they die because they have nothing more to pay for and are just ready to move on. The temple priest, the Reverend Dr. Thich Giac Duc, told me that, although it is a secret, he knows, through meditation, that Trang has been reborn in the Pure Land.

Thao Nguyen says she thinks this is true, but also says she is selfish, because she wants Trang to be reborn. Recently, she had a dream in which Trang was away but missed her friends and exams and graduation. She wanted to know if she could return or if she had missed too much to make up. Thao reassured her that it was not too late, she could still come back, there was still a place for her here.

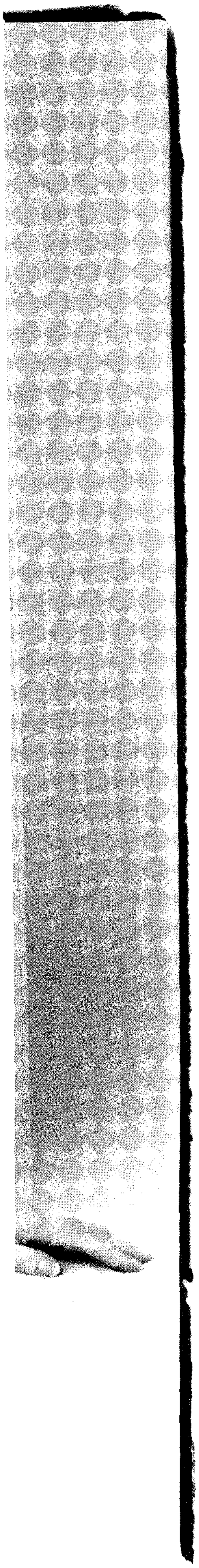
For a long time, Thao was very angry at Sinedu: she would write in her diary that she hated her and her family and her country, and then she would be frightened that Sinedu might know and might try to hurt her again. "But how *could* she?" she asked again and again whenever we talked. Finally, though, she had a new dream about Sinedu: Sinedu stood at the end of her bed in the darkness. Sinedu didn't say anything, because they had not talked while she was alive, but she tried to look at her and touched Thao's leg in a way that made Thao understand that she was sorry now. "Maybe she could not help herself," Thao told me, in a soft voice.

ON May 25th, a Buddhist ceremony is planned at the gravesite to commemorate the anniversary of Trang's death. Trang is buried in Mt. Auburn Cemetery—a beautiful nineteenth-century cemetery, where Longfellow and Mary Baker Eddy and generations of Harvard dignitaries and élite Bostonians are buried. In the ceremony, a fire is to be made in a metal bowl, and bits of clothing, money, a small symbolic house, and letters to Trang are to be burned to send them to her spirit.

Last year, hundreds of people attended Trang's funeral, watching as the saffron-robed priest clanged bells and burned incense and chanted in Vietnamese and Sanskrit. Finally, the Reverend Dr. Thich Giac Duc looked up and translated: "Ladies and gentlemen, life is impermanence. Life is full of sorrow. Death causes sorrow. Love and separation cause sorrow. Violence causes more sorrow. We must not follow the way of violence but practice love and compassion toward friend and foe."

The family circled the coffin three times, escorting Trang into a new life. Male relatives carried Mrs. Ho, too weak to walk. The casket was lowered into the earth, and each family member dropped a flower upon it. Then, one by one, Trang's relatives and friends, members of the temple, high-school and college teachers, and the president of Harvard and other officials lined up before the grave.

There was a dancelike quality to the procession, moving silently and rhythmically forward as people dropped their blossoms upon the onyx casket. The reality of the loss is so overwhelming that all reflection seems to collapse into a sense of inevitability: Sinedu was possessed by spirits or psychosis; Trang was perfected and ready to enter into the Pure Land; Harvard didn't foresee and couldn't prevent anything. "You decide where your life is going, whether you are going to make a difference or not," Trang had told her high-school class in her valedictory speech. "For me, I will make many differences." Her words drift downward, like falling flowers. ♦



TONY PORTFOLIO

BROADWAY BRAVOS

A season to remember.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS CALLIS

MAX EISEN, a veteran New York press agent and theatrical *philosophe*, recently applauded, on the basis of Broadway first principles, Julie Andrews' refusal of a Tony Award nomination for Best Actress in a musical. "Where there's noise, there's dollars," he said, putting in a nutshell the annual hubbub over the Antoinette Perry Awards, which celebrate their fiftieth anniversary this season. And so it has proved. As the world knows, Andrews withdrew Her Starriness from the ceremonies because other members of "Victor/Victoria"—whose cast album should be played to first offenders in lieu of their doing hard labor—were "egregiously overlooked." The newspapers inevitably pounced on the story. But what has really been egregiously overlooked is the buoyancy of theatre.

The *Times* seemed almost tongue-tied this year at having to break the good news of Broadway's season. "That Broadway is dead is so often repeated that it is conventional wisdom, a truism without being true," said an article subtitled "SEEMS LIKE OLD TIMES WITH INFLUX OF THEATERGOERS." You can call Broadway many things, but "dead" is not one of them; nor is it "the perennial economic invalid," as Frank Rich recently claimed in his *Times* Op-Ed column. If a billion-dollar-a-year industry with an estimated 1996 attendance of 9.4 million—almost *twice* as much as

Elaine Stritch, of "A Delicate Balance," and, above, Jimmy Tate, Vincent Bingham, Savion Glover, and Baakari Wilder, of "Bring In da Noise, Bring In da Funk."

the combined attendance at the games of New York's professional sports teams—is "dead," then gallstones are jewelry. Broadway's "influx" of paying customers is not news to Broadway. According to a 1994 report by the Port Authority, the theatre contributes about $2.3 billion annually to the city's economy. So proper attention both to Broadway and to Off Broadway (whose attendance, incidentally, went up fifteen per cent, to 3.5 million in 1994 and held constant in 1995) should be paid.

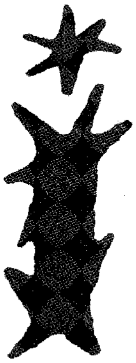
Collected in this portfolio are some of the artists who have left their mark on the season and on the critics: Elaine Stritch, nominated for Best Actress in a play, brings her chain-saw voice and her stevedore's attitude back to Broadway in Gerald Gutierrez's fine revival of Edward Albee's family drama "A Delicate Balance," at the Plymouth. (She is in good company, up against her castmate Rosemary Harris, Carol Burnett, and Zoe Caldwell, who captured the imposing Maria Callas in "Master Class.") The late Jonathan Larson's "Rent" and George C. Wolfe and Savion Glover's "Bring In da Noise, Bring In da Funk" will be duking it out for Best Musical. For my money, Larson's music has heartbreaking promise, but Glover's tap dancing and Wolfe's production have genius, bringing the rhythms and realities of the street onto the stage with undeniable virtuosity. In terms of serious drama, this season's group of only a handful of serious plays might seem an embarrassment, but it's what Broadway calls bumper. The team of playwright August Wilson and director Lloyd Richards, who are shown together here, have produced two Pulitzer Prize-winning plays. They provide another compelling evening, at the Walter Kerr, with "Seven Guitars"—a show full of folk wisdom and fine characterizations, the seventh in a ten-play cycle by Wilson that chronicles African-American life. And what would Broadway be without a splashy revival? Here Donna Murphy, as Anna, is swept off her feet by Lou Diamond Phillips, as the King of Siam, in Rodgers and Hammerstein's evergreen "The King and I." The mood of the photograph seems apt for the Broadway season: there's a dance in the old dame yet.—JOHN LAHR

August Wilson and Lloyd Richards, the author and the director of "Seven Guitars," above, and Donna Murphy and Lou Diamond Phillips in "The King and I."

FICTION

WHO KNOWS WHY

BY JULIE HECHT



I HAVE to be careful where I go in this town. Because last week I used an obscenity. I actually called out an obscene directive to a clerk in a paint store. I can't believe that I did such a thing.

At the time, I was with the floorman—a friend of ours—and later on he complimented me for having done it. "But there's no excuse for what I did," I said. I was sick with remorse.

"Why? It was appropriate for the situation," he said. "It was perfect, as a matter of fact."

But I always compare myself to Jacqueline Kennedy whenever my behavior falls short of my expectations, and I know that she would never under any circumstances have used a curse word in public. I make the comparison even though I'm a generation below hers, to say nothing of my social class; I'm closer to her daughter's generation than to hers, but I know that her daughter would never use the word, either. Although I did see Princess Radziwill in an organic-food market one June day, and when the item she was searching for was unavailable she *said, "Blast it!"* I'd never heard the word exclaimed before, or even said in the U.S.A. I had followed the Princess down the street in East Hampton, not on purpose, just coincidentally; we were on the way to the same store.

First, I'd noticed the Princess in another food store without knowing who she was. She was headed toward the freezer. The reason I noticed her was that she had such perfect-looking legs and arms. Her perfect limbs were visible because it was the beginning of a heat wave and she was wearing khaki shorts and a white silk T-shirt. She walked over to the freezer in a floppy but determined way. Her hair was wet, and the back section was pinned up to her head with a clip, the way mine might be during a heat wave. I thought she was just some forty-four-year-old woman I'd never seen in these parts before. But when I checked to see what face went with the perfect limbs I was surprised to recognize Princess Radziwill. She wasn't wearing any make-up on her extremely young-looking face.

As the Princess gathered up some ordinary-looking peaches and nectarines, I stared at her and calculated her waist to be about seventeen inches—almost the same size as Scarlett O'Hara's and also the same as a neck measurement I'd seen in the collar of a shirt owned by Dr. Arnold Loquesto, the world-renowned reproductive surgeon I'd consulted and, later, photographed.

Eventually, I left the store for the street, where the temperature was on its way up to a hundred, although it wasn't even 10 A.M., and before I knew it the Princess was in front of me, walking in her fast, unique way to a little sports car. She opened the door and dropped her bag of groceries inside, then walked quickly down the street and into the organic store. There, I must admit, I did want to know which organic product the Princess would be interested in. I hoped she wouldn't be buying any juice from the juice bar, because I had studied the setup at this place and the hygienic situation was not good. The carrots were none too clean, in my opinion. There wasn't much else to buy there. There was only one of everything, or not even one—there was one of a few things. There were no prices. When you inquired about a price, all the sales help would fall into a dither asking each other, and then start guessing. If anyone asked for produce, they'd say, "In the cooler." Once the owner did a little pirouette and said, "Come with me into the cooler!" The cooler, I saw when he opened the door, was at least clean. In the early days of organic food, customers were expected to go into unclean coolers all the time and pick their carrots out of big plastic sacks on the floor. But I didn't want to dwell on that part of my life, the hours spent in coolers in lower Manhattan digging out a few carrots.

I was wishing I could know which item the Princess couldn't find that hot morning when I spied my exercise teacher, wearing a pink tutu. It was really some kind of tiny summer dress with a ruffled skirt the length of short shorts. Although my teacher is not yet thirty and her legs have excellent tone from her life of exercise, my legs are better shaped and I would never have worn such a getup, unless I was eight years old. Also, this teacher is German and the Germans are not entitled to dress so frivolously. She has a guilty way about her, although she probably hasn't been educated on the subject of what she should be guilty about. She was furtively ordering some kind of strange juice combination like parsley-beet-celery. She had told me some time ago that she would be away this week. So, here at the juice area, I said "When are you leaving?" and she said "Right now," most likely a lie she had invented on the spot. She was always hiding something. Everything was a secret. And that accent got on my nerves. "Visualize something," she would say with her eyes closed during the class, so I'd visualize her parents and her grandparents and what they were doing in 1942. "Visualize a mountain or a lake"—she would say "waves, wind, water—when you do this exercise," but I couldn't. I'd stare right at her—she didn't even look German, with her black pixie haircut; I looked more German than she did—and I'd picture her relatives in their uniforms. I think she knew it, too. That's why she was nervous. She was always trying to cancel my classes for one reason or another—a course in a faraway state, a yoga festival, this or that—and there she was, on a day she was supposed to be going on a trip to Canada, right here in town, having cancelled class, and ordering juice. How could I have gotten myself a German exercise teacher? She was the only one who stayed all winter and wanted to have a year-round clientele. That's what she said—who knew the real reason?

I had picked up the "who knows?" line of thinking from many hours of talking on the phone to Dr. Loquesto's thirteen-year-old son. He'd launch into long de-

FILIP PAGOWSKI

scriptions of a person or an event, and in the middle he'd say, "Who knows why?"

One incident involved a woman who arrived at his house on Sunday afternoon with "thirty cakes in three large white shopping bags." It turned out that the woman brought the cakes because she was grateful to the boy for once giving her sixteen different phone numbers where Dr. Loquesto might be reached.

"She's a dentist, and a baker on the side, or else she's a baker, and a dentist on the side—who knows which?—and she keeps experimenting with recipes. Each one is worse than the last. Like one was a carrot cake, but with zucchini, pumpkins, kiwis—it was filled with every vegetable ever farmed! And she always includes a coffee cake with millions of raisins, and *nuts*, which I hate. Then, one was a plain yellow cake with a spongelike feel. When you cut into it with your fork, water would pour out."

"It must have been rum," I said.

"No, I swear to you it was *water*, believe me, plain *water!*"

The dentist-baker and her husband and two little children stood on the lawn for a few minutes with the thirty cakes in the three bags. They put the bags down and began discussing different routes they had taken to get to Massachusetts from Rhode Island. Then they left.

"People do that—they go for drives in good weather and discuss the roads they took," the boy explained.

Although he noticed these kinds of things, he was able to lead a normal life and knew how to use a computer.

I had child-sat and cooked vegetarian dinners for him a few times, but he never ate any of the meals. Probably the boy described my salads the way he described the dentist's cakes: "She arrives with twelve kinds of lettuce, and washes the leaves hundreds of times and asks for a lettuce dryer—which we don't have—while talking about the waste of paper towels, and ecology, and who knows what other liberal ideas. The salad always has to have this olive-tasting olive oil from some part of Italy—who knows which. I can't eat one leaf of it!"

MY only goal that hot June morning was to go to the hardware store and purchase as many fans as I could for the heat wave. But now I was wondering how the Princess could look so good and calmly go about her errands when someone had built a gigantic concrete house in the style of an airplane hangar right next to hers, with a concrete wall that blocks the view the Princess once had of the sunset, the sky, the beach, and the water. What did she say when that happened? I hoped she used a curse word. Often, I was stopped by strangers on my walk to photograph the nearby pond and they'd ask, "How did the town allow this?"—something I hadn't bothered to research, because I was always wishing we could move away to a normal place where there were no princesses.

But if we moved to a new town I'd need the services of the floorman, and that might start things up again.

ALL we did was add two small rooms. I haven't even mentioned the builder. That's because he's become the unmentionable one. "Sure, he's the best painter, but is it worth it?" the builder would say about the painter. Then I asked him who he would recommend, and he said, "No one. They've all breathed too many fumes and it's affected them this way."

I'd go into one of the three paint stores and the owner would say "How are you doing with your painter?" and then he'd laugh—a crazed, knowing laugh. Once, this encouraged me to confide in him: "The assistant rolled the paint onto the floor instead of using a brush and it left roller marks all over, so the main painter had to do it again. He took my boxes and files of photographs, and all my camera equipment from my new workroom, and piled it up in the bathtub on top of the boxes. Then he threw in whatever cleaning equipment was around—a mop, a pail, a can of Comet, and a sponge—and sanded the paint off the floor without covering anything. When he finished, everything was covered with light-green paint dust and I couldn't get to my equipment in the tub because he'd repainted the floor and it was wet."

"That sounds like him," the paint-store owner said.

"Do you know any other painters?" I asked.

"I know some good ones, but you have the best. He's a perfectionist. That's the whole thing."

I'd once seen the painter eating a peanut-butter sandwich and a banana in our hallway. I said, "That was Elvis Presley's favorite meal."

"Yeah, but he ate them together on the same sandwich," he said. I was impressed that the painter knew such a thing.

Then I tried asking him for a floorman and he said, "There are two. One drinks. The other doesn't show up."

All the workmen hated each other. They blamed each other for whatever went wrong. The builder fired our plumber and hired his own. One day this new plumber didn't show up—the reason given was that a shark bit his arm and he needed seventeen stitches, or seventeen inches of stitches. When you live near the ocean, you hear excuses of this kind. In the country you hear about hunting accidents, but people never return from those. In the beginning, the builder and the shark-bitten plumber got along—that was before the big bite—then an assistant plumber took over and he made mistakes. The builder blamed it all on our original plumber, the one who never showed up because he had an important job putting plumbing into a new hotel. Later on, when I read a review of the hotel, the only thing that got a good report was the water pressure. I was happy. That's our plumber, I thought, until I remembered that *was* our plumber. Who knew if he'd return after the builder was rude to him?

I TRACE the cause of the obscenity way back to the origin of my acquaintance with the floorman. We were so young then that we thought we could have any old floorman do the floors of our apartment in a hundred-year-old building in SoHo. When it came to choosing the stain, he had only three, and they were all dark brown. Then I noticed the alcohol fumes, and they were coming from him, not from the bucket of floor stain. I also noticed that he had sanded away so much wood that the floor was lower on one side of the room than on the other.

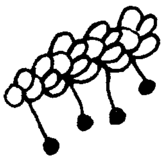
"I love wood," the next floorman said as he got down on the floor and explained how he'd fix the butchering of it, and I believed he did love wood, the way he crawled around touching the floor with real feeling.

One thing he did wrong was to ask for old sheets because he forgot to bring drop cloths to keep the sand dust out of the other rooms. But we hadn't been married long enough to have old things, so he went and took a new one from the linen closet.

The other thing he did was to take a piece of a chocolate cake that I had baked. This was before my conversion to macrobiotics. "Homemade chocolate cake is my favorite," he'd said.

When I recently reminded him of the incident, he said, "Those were my wild days—my drinking days. I believed the refrigerator came with the job."

It didn't occur to me at the time that he was drunk. He was only thirty-one, about eight years older than I was. He had bright-red hair, as bright as Victoria Page had in "The Red Shoes," and he had white skin and freckles that went with the hair. But he was gruff. One day I asked him if he was related to a girl I'd known in college, a girl who had red hair and the same last name. "She's my sister," the floorman said without any expression.



It turned out that the floorman had gone to a good college, too. He'd even graduated, but it wasn't something he liked to talk about. He liked to talk about wood. He wanted to tear up the old linoleum in the kitchen and sand the floor underneath it. He said he bet there was a beautiful pine floor under the linoleum. The thing he hadn't counted on was some black tarpaper they used to glue down the linoleum. That had to be torn up and sanded off, too. The old black tarpaper and glue flew around in tiny bits and stuck everywhere as he sanded.

There was always something he hadn't counted on—something that got him really angry—and he would keep talking about it as he worked on the floor. For example, he hadn't counted on 110 electrical current. "Everything is two-twenty now! How old is this building? One-ten! I didn't count on that!" he'd mutter as he stuck a fork into the fuse box to keep the fuse from blowing when he plugged in his machine. I stopped him from using an antique silver fork. We didn't have any spare forks, just as we didn't have any old sheets, and that was how he worked—do you have an old this or that every hour or so, for whatever crisis was coming up. "It won't hurt anything," he'd say, going to the fuse box with a silver fork in hand. He had a Dr. Frankenstein look as he approached the box: "It's just fork prongs in a fuse." You had to keep your eye on him all the time.

On the last day of the floorman's first job for us, twenty years ago, he arrived for work wearing a heavy tweed suit that appeared to be from Ireland or Scotland. It was a mixture of beige, green, and a rust color that matched his hair. "I'm going upstate for a wedding after finishing here. I don't want to wrinkle my suit so I thought I'd wear it here and change over to my work clothes, if you don't mind," he said. I didn't mind, because I was sure the floorman had nothing up his sleeve in that department.

Over the years, workmen have had things up their sleeves when they changed clothes in our house. A tile man changed his pants in the dining room and then pretended to be surprised when I walked by. Before going through house renovations—tiling, floor work, painting, masonry, carpentry, landscaping—and reproductive surgery, my looks were intact and workmen found reasons to pull off their pants and put on another pair in front of me.

Time passed for us and the floorman. One day we called to ask him to do another room. He came by, looked around, and complimented us on caring for the floors. I told him I'd discovered a floor waxer and kept him waxing every year until the time I called and a woman answered, "Jesus loves you." She didn't even say hello first.

Then, catching a glimpse of the hundred-year-old fuse box, the floorman said, "Sweetheart, I can't deal with that one-ten voltage again." But it was O.K. for him to call me sweetheart, because he'd taken to calling my husband sweetheart, too. "I forgot about that. I would've thought they'd changed that over by now!"

"What about the fork?" I said.

"Oh, God, did I do that? It's all coming back to me." Then we both started to laugh, but I knew that he probably hadn't changed and would use cutlery again if he had to. "I don't go sticking forks in fuse boxes anymore, sweetheart," he said. "I'm a bit more professional," he added, as if he were going to tip his hat and dance a jig.

After that he moved to Georgia. His old clients would call him from all over. If the floor couldn't wait for him, he'd tell how to interview other floormen, to see whether they had respect for wood. Our floorman was as sought after as Dr. Loquesto, but he hadn't learned to manage his time the way the surgeon had, so he'd sigh and give long explanations, whereas the surgeon would just hang up.

It was when we bought our house that we got the floorman to come up from Georgia for the first time. And it was on that trip that he told us about his recovery from alcoholism. But his recovery didn't help his work. Something always went wrong right away. This time he had to rent a generator from a motorcycle dealer on the highway. I went with him in his van, because even with the recovery from alcohol he didn't have a credit card. He'd rigged up a makeshift seat belt because the van was so old it didn't have any. As I was trying to hook it up, I saw an old apple core on the floor.

"Usually I don't take the lady of the house in my van to get a generator," he said when I pointed it out.

After a while I got used to having the floorman around. When he asked for an old sheet, I gave him the one he'd ruined fifteen years before. "I'd never get that color on it now—I've invented my own line of tung-oil stain," he said, staring at the color.

It was when he got around to hand-sanding the stair treads that I noticed how well he blended in with the walls and the wood. His skin was the same pale peach as the paint, and his hair was light red—no longer as red as when he'd done our first floors. His hands were pickled peach, with gold stain deep in the cracked skin of the fingers, and he was tinted from head to toe with a mixture of sawdust and orange-gold floor stain. A little statue of him would have looked good on the steps.

When the time came to view the samples he'd mixed for the floor, I chose the first one. This thrilled the floorman. "You've reached the highest level of Zen," he said. "Because all it is is plain tung oil on wood. I mixed color into the others, but you chose the purest one. Sweetheart, you understand wood."

After that job ended, I was afraid to see the floorman again. I know that people in later stages of life have been killed off by house renovations, and I was afraid that the floor job and all the work on the house had polished off the remainder of my youthful appearance.

But then he surprised me by passing through our town on a social call with his new girlfriend, who was about forty-seven. I had to admire him for choosing someone near his own age. Lucky for her she had bone structure to hold up the disillusionment and misery that tried to work on her face. She also had manicured nails with red nail polish, and she wore gold jewelry on her fingers and wrists—just the right amount. On her dainty feet she had velvet ballet slippers to go with her black velvet toreador pants. How this lovely lady had ended up with the floorman and his rough, floorlike ways was something I wondered the minute I saw her. The floorman was dressed up in a blue striped shirt, a navy-blue blazer, gray flannel slacks, and even those black loafers with tassels. Maybe the shoes were her influence.

We sat down for a drink as if we were four normal people. Our beverages were alcohol-free. I was looking at those painted nails and the small tinkling charm bracelet and wondering whether I should try out such a look. I remembered reading that nail polish prevents the nails from breathing.

The floorman wasn't in his floor mode, but we finally persuaded him to get up from the couch and go look at a big black streak on the kitchen floor. In his dark dress-up clothes he no longer went with the colors of the room, and when he left it was a relief.

"What could have eaten through the finish?" he asked a few times when he returned. Then he said, "The entire floor has to be redone." He'd have to put the job together with some other jobs in the vicinity. He was always putting together a few jobs in one area, but usually none of them materialized.

A YEAR went by. I looked at the streak every day, but the new rooms were in progress and I had an idea. The idea was to build a little potting area in one of the rooms. This had been on my mind since I watched Myrna Loy describe a little flower room she wanted in the movie "Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House." I like to watch this movie over and over because it's so unrealistic.

Unlike Mrs. Blandings, I didn't tell the builder that I wanted a nice dry stone floor "where it might be wet with flowers and things." All I said was "Maybe we should have this part of the floor done in concrete or something so I can get potting soil and water spilled on it." If only I hadn't said that and the whole floor had been done in wood. To tell the truth, when I was standing there with my husband and the builder, I did say, "What about a drain?" But I was quickly shouted down: "Pipes under the floor . . . dollars . . . plumbers crawl underneath . . . attach to . . . tear out . . . put in new . . ." Then I said, "What about Mrs. Blandings' little flower sink?" "Prices were lower in 1948," my husband said really fast. While the builder started to tell how much every single thing he knew about had cost in the forties compared with now, I wandered off. My husband stayed and listened to the old prices for nails.

Eventually, it got to be the time for the floorman to return. The floors of the new rooms plus the kitchen floor added up to a job worth his travelling time.

THE aroma of tung oil and sawdust makes it seem that something good is happening, but I was dreading the moment the floorman would start working in the kitchen. He'd be underfoot again with all his electrical problems, which I knew would crop up.

"It's a good thing you left half the floor concrete," he said after he'd piled the appliances onto it, "because otherwise all this would be sitting out in the rain." Then he laughed.

"But now I have to find the right blue-green to paint it," I said.

He was bent over, hand-sanding a corner, and he couldn't hear because he'd put cotton in his ears to block out the noise of the machine.

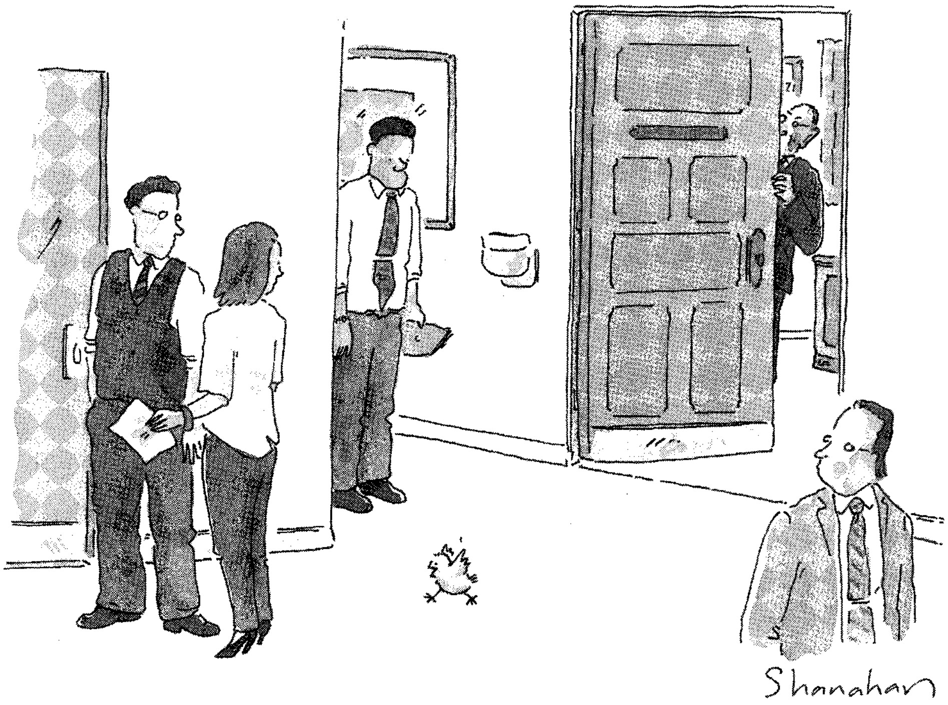
"Maybe I should give up and try spatter paint," I said as he unstuffed his ears.

"Spatter paint's for idiots," he said. "You'll see—we'll go to the paint store, we'll pick out the right green."

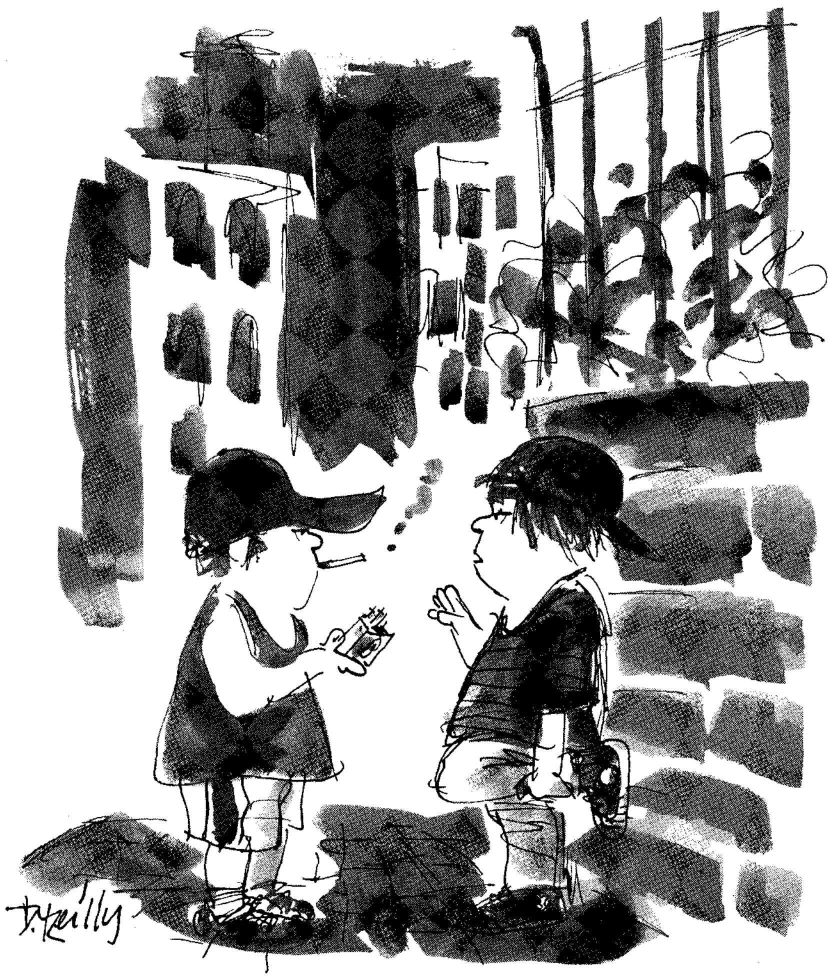
But since I'd been trained by a watercolor landscape painter to mix peach-tinted off-whites, I thought I could find the right color on my own. I was filled with hope as I entered the paint store. If not hope, then optimism, or just stupidity. I walked through the doorway and caught a glimpse of hundreds of paint chips. When the owner saw me he began to sing "Earth Angel." This had been his custom ever since the time we tried to get the color of moss growing on earth.

After I explained my project, he gave me the bad news: in order to paint a floor, you had to use floor paint. "Sorry to disappoint you," he said. "Only two greens. Of course, we can fiddle around with the formula."

I remembered watching with admiration the way Ralph Lauren had the window frames of the Rhinelander Mansion painted three times until they got the right color. I wanted to write a letter of approval, but I knew that Ralph Lauren wouldn't care what I thought of his paint choices. My published photographs dem-



"The axe is falling! The axe is falling!"



"No, thanks. I'm trying to quit."

onstrating how to remove the polo player from various garments had had no impact on the man or his business. I have to face it—compared with Ralph Lauren, I'm no one. Calvin Klein, too. Although I did recently see Mr. Klein walk into a florist's shop in East Hampton and ask for branches. "Do you have any branches?" I heard a voice say in a New York accent, and turned to see a man in shorts and a T-shirt with a sweater tied around his waist. The florist said no, and the designer left. Had she known the man's identity, surely some branches would have been cut down immediately.

DAYS passed. I went back and forth with the sample quarts of paint. The floorman was readying himself to come into the house to work on the kitchen floor. I was worried. I saw him preparing to move everything out of the kitchen into the dining room. He told me his plan: an orderly progression of chairs, tables, and kitchen equipment placed in a way that would allow us to get to the stove and the refrigerator. I'd be able to boil water for twig tea. On the last day, he'd move the refrigerator out. And I believed him. Never could I have imagined a room piled with tables, chairs, desks, teakettles, boxes of tea, gold coffee filters, crusts of toast, fruit, steel wool, tung oil, paint samples on shirt cardboards, floor-sanding machines, floorman's work clothes, stained work boots, and dress-up moccasins—all in the same spot.

IT was a bleak November day when the floorman and I finally set off in separate vehicles for the paint store.

"I'll make my own color if I have to," he said when we got there. "I know how to make green," he said. "You start with red," he continued. This was news to me. It was frightening news.

"Stop adding blue and green. If blue and yellow make green, and red and yellow make orange, you add the orange by starting with red," he said.

"Why are we adding orange?" I asked.

"You want to warm it up, rather than cool it down, you said—didn't you say that?" The floorman was getting a tone in his voice that Dr. Loquesto has right before a tantrum. A patient once told me, "He flew into a rage and knocked over the Betadine and the lamp. Then he stormed out."

I pictured the orange color of the Betadine. That would be right for warming up the green. But I knew the floorman wasn't in the mood for any medical anecdotes so I just said, "Oh." Knowing when to say nothing is important. And I haven't learned that. Although I feel ready to take a vow of silence and enter a monastery. Most likely, women are banned from being monks. I pictured the monkery with all that peace and silence, and monks walking slowly through the greenery. Who landscaped for the lucky monks? If a landscape worker planted a viburnum right against a holly and smashed a little quince in between, and ran off, what would the monks say? How could they keep their vows of silence then? Maybe monks planted their own shrubs. That had to be part of a life of peace and meditation.

I watched the floorman go over to a bunch of crazy-looking colors. His hair was hardly red anymore. It was faded, with some white mixed in, and he was stooped and bent like a man who's been around a lot of trouble for a long time. I'd heard parts of the business calls he had to make each day to arrange his next jobs, his tung-oil stain company affairs, and also his sympathy calls to his clients who were undergoing house restorations: "It's hell . . . sweetheart, you don't have to tell me . . . deadly . . . the lowest creatures on earth . . ."

And now he'd put it all aside to help me find the right green. But I'd spent the morning trying to find my boxes of twig tea amid the jumble of floor supplies—he'd left a floor-sanding machine in front of the table and I'd been squeezing in between them for two days. "How can you live this way?" I asked him now and then. "What should I do—drink a quart of tung oil? I'm probably immune to the polymerized resins by now and it wouldn't even kill me."

We came up with a simple formula to add to the base. But the accommodating, song-singing owner wasn't behind the counter that day. A serious-looking woman I'd never seen there this time. And when we told her our request, she said, "Why don't you just pick a color from the chart?"

I heard the floorman sigh.

I explained, "We've tried that. We need to do it this way." I said that the owner did it all the time.

"You can't add color to floor paint or it gets too soft," she said. "We won't be responsible if it wears off."

I explained that it was a tiny piece of floor in a potting area—they wouldn't be held responsible even if it wore off in one day. "It's not even a wood floor," I said. "It's cement."

"Concrete, it's just concrete. Here, let me see the formula book," the floorman said in his gruff voice.

"I'm telling you right now, we won't be responsible, I don't care who mixed what for you when," the clerk said. "What color do you want? They make enough colors that anyone should find one without making up formulas. That's the job of the paint company. You think you can do better than Benjamin Moore?"

I knew I could do better than Benjamin Moore. Who was Benjamin Moore, anyway? Was he an actual person, like Colonel Sanders, Orville Redenbacher, or Tom Carvel? I'd always pictured him as Thomas Jefferson. I said to the floorman, "Oh, never mind. Let's go."

"O.K.," he said. "You go on. I want to look at what kinds of junk they sell as sealants." He said this quietly, just to me.

Actually, there was no one in the large paint-can-filled room but the three of us.

"Have you looked at the floor paints?" the clerk asked.

"O.K., I'm leaving," I said to no one, just a general sentence into the air.

When I reached the end of the aisle near the door, I heard the clerk say, "How rude!"

And since my hand was almost on the door handle, about to pull it toward me as I had so many times before—those times filled with hope and anticipation of seeing the right green, but this time empty-handed into the damp gray afternoon, back to the mad tableaux the floorman had created in our house—I felt a need to say something. And then I heard the words "F—— you" as I went through the door. The words came right from where I was standing. I couldn't believe it. But I was so far from the counter that they might not have heard. On the other hand, the store was empty. Their AM radio music wasn't on the way it is when wild-looking guys are in back, manning the counter. Maybe it sounded like "Thank you." If reprimanded—or arrested, even—for saying the words, I could explain, "I said 'Thank you.' She misunderstood."

Sure, that might work. Because once I heard my husband say "Thank you" to a toll-booth attendant and it sounded just like the other phrase.

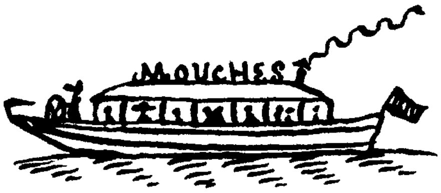
What defense could I use? I didn't have Tourette's syndrome. People with that affliction can't help what they're saying. Different defenses flipped through my mind: "Temporary insanity." "An uncontrollable urge." "Crime of passion."

By the time I got home, I was deep into remorse. When the floorman came in I pretended that nothing had happened. But he started saying how great it was: "More people should do it," and "You'll get some respect now." I mentioned something about Jacqueline Kennedy, although I felt unfit even to say her name.

When he finished work he suggested we go out for some dinner, but I said I wasn't hungry. I figured I'd never be hungry again. It would go with the life of silence and abstinence I was planning.

That night I tried lying on the couch and watching CNN for a few hours. But I noticed that the floorman had left his sanding machine in the living room. I got up and opened the door to the screen porch. I didn't know whether being exposed to the elements might harm the machine. Rain wasn't predicted. Not enough to blow in through the screens, anyway. I grabbed the handles and started to wheel the machine out the door. It was even heavier than I'd suspected. That must have been how the floorman got his stooped-over look.

In order to fall asleep, I drank some tincture of valerian root and tried to do a breathing-relaxation exercise I'd read about in the book "Natural Health, Natural Medicine." Then I looked through an antique landscaping book and saw a photograph captioned "An Incorrect Base Planting: A popular practice has been the use of a miscellaneous assortment of evergreens in beds close to the house." The sight of the hideously incorrect planting quickly undid the relaxation.



WHEN the kitchen floor dried the next day, all that remained to be done was to get the furniture and the refrigerator moved back in. The floorman had arranged for the builder to come around and give him a hand with that. I was upstairs at the time. What was I doing that was so important that I couldn't have supervised this final moment? "Why doesn't the refrigerator have wheels?" he'd asked when they moved it out of the kitchen. "Because the model with wheels had a brown plastic drawer with the words 'Meat and Snacks' on it," I said.

"Hell, we could have sanded that off!" the floorman said. "You painted out Giorgio Armani's name on the sidepiece of your sunglass frames."

When I came downstairs to look at the floor—it was a beautiful golden red, with everything back in place—I noticed something in front of the refrigerator. A kind of long scrape. "What's that?" I asked.

"Oh, I guess we did that when we moved your no-wheels refrigerator," the floorman said. "It's good—it gives the floor some character."

I looked at it closely. It was more like a long gouge mark he'd filled in with some special concoction—tung oil and stain-colored filler, maybe.

"Who helped you move this?" I asked, looking at the appliance.

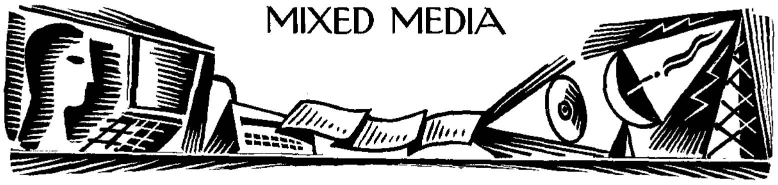
"Your builder obliged when he came by this morning to get a check from the man of the house."

I tried to imagine the scene and what they said when they saw what they had done. I kept looking down at the floor because I was afraid to look at the floorman's face. I didn't want to see the sadness and regret.

At least the scrape wasn't black, or as bad as the old one. But I was wondering why a man would travel up across all those states with all that equipment in his van—how he could love wood, and know so much about floors and about mixing colors—and re-sand a whole floor to remove a scrape, and then move a refrigerator and put a brand-new scrape back in.

"It gives the look of an antique, a certain quality of age and richness—don't you think? Sweetheart, it adds beauty to the wood, don't you agree?"

I thought about it for a few seconds. The answer was no. But I didn't say anything. I didn't say a word. ♦



LETTERMAN UNBOUND

Dave's No. 2, and trying harder.

BY JAMES WOLCOTT

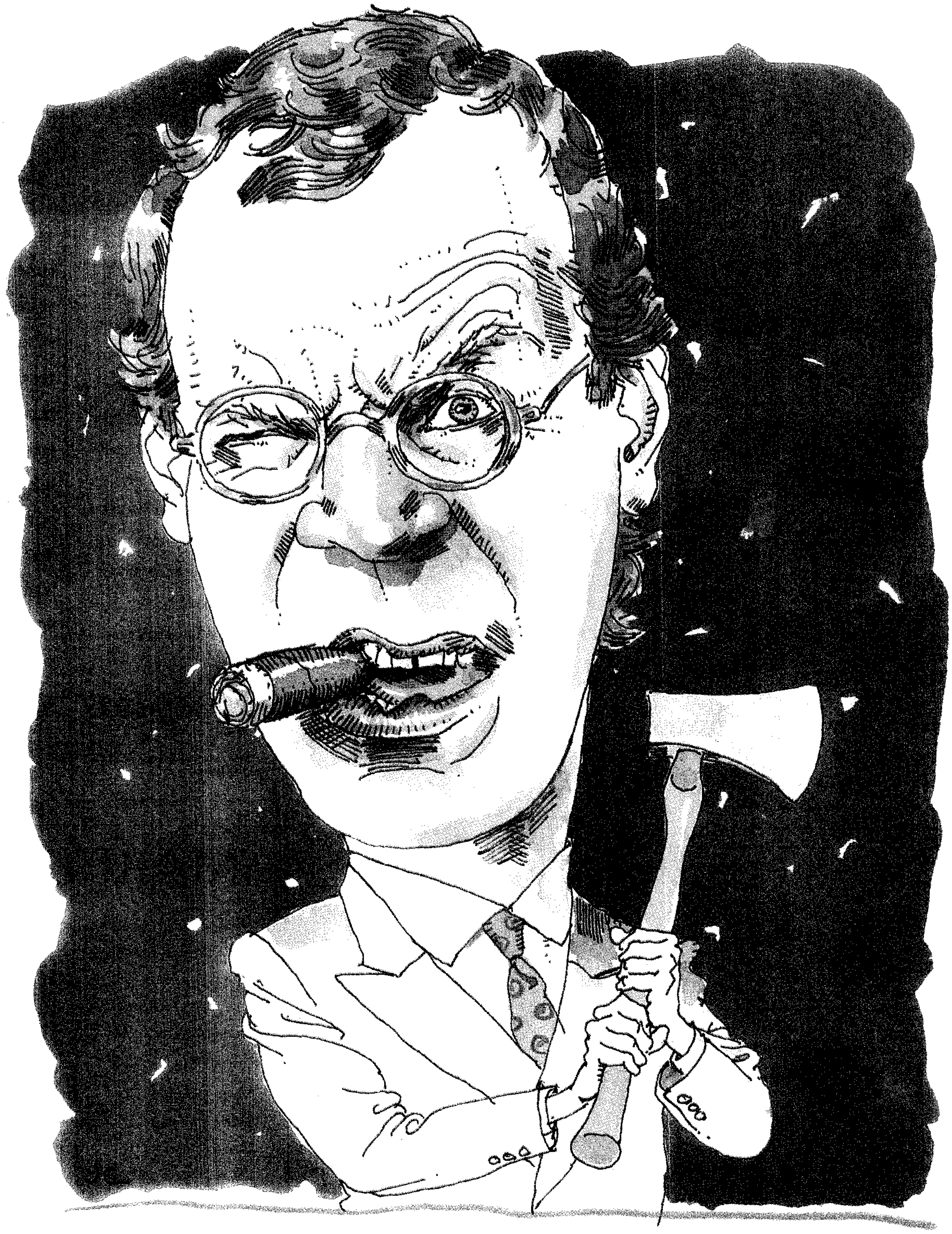
When the king stumbles, the flunkies take the fall. After defecting from NBC to CBS, David Letterman dominated late-night show biz with the launching of the "Late Show," in 1993. Hosted by a leaner, almost boulevardier Dave, the "Late Show" restored Broadway glitz to the bat cave of the old Ed Sullivan Theatre and made cult figures of merchants in the area. Letterman looked unbeatable. Meanwhile, at NBC, the "Tonight Show," hosted by Jay Leno, staggered through an identity crisis as it grappled with the phantom of Johnny Carson. Trying to placate everyone at once, Leno lost his bop in the opening monologues and jerked around onstage like a puppet tangled in its own strings. Slowly, cautiously, Leno moved to emancipate himself, agreeing to let the network dump his manager-turned-producer Helen Kushnick, having the Burbank studio remodelled into a night-club setting, and cutting loose his pouty bandleader, Branford Marsalis; he also took full advantage of a booking coup when Hugh Grant gave the "Tonight Show" his first interview after his inglorious blow job. A plow horse who never gets winded, Leno pulled ahead of Letterman in the ratings and has refused to take a breather since, doing five new shows a week, with few vacations. Letterman's slide into second place, coupled with the plastering that he took over his hosting of the 1995 Academy Awards, cost him his media-darling status and put him and his show on the defensive. He could no longer afford to let the "Late Show" run on cruise control. It was now out with the old. His longtime director, Hal Gurnee, departed, and so did his announcer, Bill Wendell. Writers and other staffers jumped overboard. Some of this was normal attrition. But in March Letterman fired his executive producer, Robert Morton (Morty, as he's known), replacing him with the show's former head writer Rob Burnett. At first, Letterman tried to issue diplomatic murmurs regarding the popular Morton, but in an interview in the current issue of *Rolling Stone* he blurted, "It was just—we had a little infection, and the limb had to come off." He also expressed the fear that Morton might become his enemy for life. (If I were Morty, being compared to an infected limb might leave me a little miffed.)

The purge hasn't pacified the "Late Show" itself. On any given night, the difference between Letterman and Leno isn't one of talent or material but one of temperament. Leno is a man of no discernible psychology. He doesn't seem given to high or low moods. He's a Las Vegas vending machine of predictable jokes. Letterman is less containable. As a recent article in the New York *Observer* reported, Letterman has flared up over technical flubs and miscues that have dragged out the taping of his show, and has indulged in acts of self-loathing bordering on masochism, the most blatant example being the time he pummelled a life-size dummy of himself on the air, giving it repeated shots to the head. His neurosis has achieved classical dimensions. I happened to be reading Dr. Karen Horney's "The Neurotic Personality of Our Time" recently, and (except for the pages that reminded me of me) almost every chapter cried out, *Dave, Dave, Dave.* The grandiosity with which Letterman habitually touts himself as "the most powerful man in American broadcasting" in his opening remarks and then bashes his own image reflects an inflated yet blighted sense of self, in which he is both overlord and loser, potent yet pathetic. As Horney writes of this kind of highfalutin defeatist, "He tends to feel that he is nothing, but is irritated when he is not taken for a genius." It has often been reported how Letterman will beat up on himself after a bad show. (From *USA Today:* " 'It sucked,' he said of that night's show. 'Not very good tonight, because I was not very good tonight.' ") According to Horney, such self-criticism is disproportionate, beyond the call of duty, a pseudo martyrdom. It's a way of saying, No matter what anyone does, it's never enough; I alone suffer. She writes:

> In such suffering there are no apparent advantages to be gained, no audience that might be impressed, no sympathy to be won, no secret triumph in asserting his will over others. Nevertheless, there is a gain for the neurotic, but of a different kind. Incurring a failure in love, a defeat in competition, having to realize a definite weakness or shortcoming of his own is unbearable for one who has such high-flown notions of his uniqueness. Thus when he dwindles to nothing in his own estimation, the categories of success and failure, superiority and inferiority cease to exist; by exaggerating his pain, by losing himself in a general feeling of misery or unworthiness, the aggravating experience loses some of its reality, the sting of the special pain is lulled, narcotized.

The difference between David Letterman and the average neurotic is that the latter doesn't ride his seesaw of misery in front of millions of people. The average neurotic can keep his nothingness to himself. Even a professional neurotic, like Woody Allen, babies himself onscreen with protective blankets of culture, irony, and high-mindedness, which tend to render him a blinking figure of bafflement. Others, like Jerry Seinfeld or Paul Reiser, channel their neuroses into hypochondria or neatnik fixations. Letterman, the ninja of neurosis, is more openly embattled. It's Dave contra mundum. He has even offered to box network executives. In a recent show, he upped the ante and offered to fight the entire studio audience, except for one neatly groomed guy. Whether he's knocking himself around or pretending to bait the audience, he's seeking a muscular release for his frustration. Johnny Carson, Letterman's role model in the art of aloofness, was content to play the drums.

Despite the snit fits, Letterman seems in no danger of full mental meltdown on camera. Under Rob Burnett, the "Late Show" has regained some of its former funkiness. There are still lame bits, such as Gene Siskel wandering around the studio with a bucket of popcorn, searching for Roger Ebert (he should stay lost); and sadistic streaks, such as Letterman bullying his announcer to scream out the numbers in the mailbag segment (*"Letter Number One!"*). But Burnett, understanding that if you leave Letterman alone too much he begins to prey on himself, has in-



Letterman battling through his battle fatigue: can he ever be happy on the air?

JOE CIARDIELLO

creased the number of oddball Dave activities, which translates into boosting the number of remote bits—i.e., segments shot outside the studio, where Dave is loosed from his own echo chamber. On a recent visit to San Francisco, for example, Letterman linked up with a roly-poly young man named Manny, whose ditzy comments made Beavis and Butt-head sound like Leavis disciples. For Manny, everything was either "dank" (praise) or "schwag" (putdown). Together, he and Dave rode around and ranked people. "Roseanne—dank or schwag?" "Schwag!" A really hot babe would receive the ultimate accolade: "Diggity-dank." What made the segment good TV was that it brought out a bemused, sarcastic-older-brother side of Letterman, which is probably about as far as he can be drawn into the family of man.

Burnett also knows how to stage Letterman's personal hangups so that they become theatre of the absurd. Back from San Francisco, Letterman began complaining about how a recent dental procedure had left him with a whistle. He compared himself to a teakettle in a tie. He needled the audience for laughing about it, saying, "You're looking at a man who whistles when he talks. You act like it's a good thing. No. You're looking at a man in his darkest hour." (Letterman believes in exaggerating his pain until it becomes our pain.) Finally, after much whining by Dave, the show brought on a dentist to take a look at the offending tooth; a mini-camera peered inside Letterman's mouth, offering a red-cavern perspective of the interior. Letterman looked like a horse about to chomp into an apple, if the apple were the audience's head. It was a funny-awful spectacle, almost pornographic in its engulfing grossness. "Oh, did that make you sick?" he asked the revolted audience. "You babies!" The weird grace note of the segment was when the visiting dentist (who looked like Henny Youngman's younger brother) dropped his mask to congratulate Helen Hunt on her success in "Twister." Freaked her out.

LETTERMAN doesn't seem observably happier on the air post-Morty. His eyes still gun from beneath his slanted brow when he fixes his tie. It's questionable whether he can ever be happy on the air, given his irreconcilable desires to be the magnetic center and to be left the hell alone. He's forty-nine years old, single (although he makes halfhearted noises about marrying his longtime girlfriend), and tries to make comedy out of his loner status. (One of the show's segments involves finding Dave a "friend.") He has all the makings of an old fussbudget. Since Burnett has taken the helm, however, Letterman's nervous energy isn't as free-floating and quick to sour. He's forcing himself to focus, as if trying to will himself back to the early days of late-night, when the Top Ten List and Stupid Pet Tricks and goofy pranks were still fresh. A trouper, he's battling through his battle fatigue, which is an arduous way to have fun. Once you reach Letterman's age, holding on to your immaturity is hard work. His triumph as a comic performer is that his efforts, unlike Leno's, never look mechanical. Out among the people in the remote segments, he adopts the loose, droopy manner of a bumbling jerk on holiday. His top half sinks into itself, like a wheezed-out accordion. With his floppy clothes and crumpled face, he's anti-charisma in action, taking a break from fame. He looks sleepy, half shucked. Watching Dave at such moments, you feel that his idea of bliss would be to leave his body behind and join the silver shade of Johnny Carson somewhere in the distant sunlight. He would gladly be rid of himself if he didn't have a show to do. ♦

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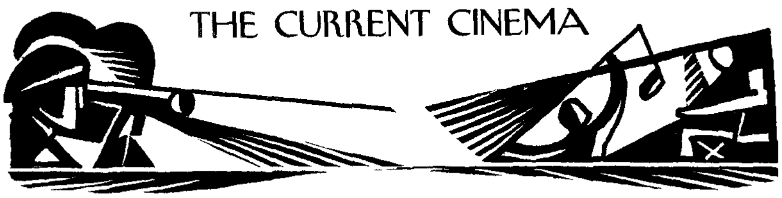
THE CURRENT CINEMA

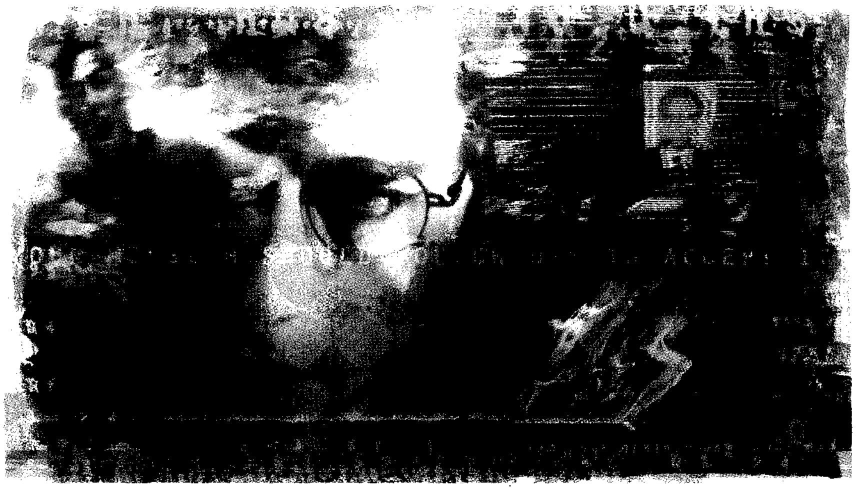


THE ILLUSIONIST

Brian De Palma makes action-movie magic in "Mission: Impossible."

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

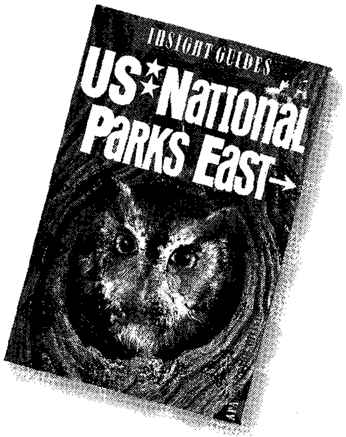
THE omnipresent television ads for the new movie "Mission: Impossible" coyly withhold the information that the picture is directed by Brian De Palma. Clearly, the studio marketers are afraid of distracting a potentially huge audience from their picture's obvious selling points: nostalgia for the long-running TV series of the same name, and the presence of a big, big star—Tom Cruise (who is also one of the producers). From the advertisers' point of view, any mention of De Palma—author of the deliriously gory horror movies "Carrie" and "The Fury," the perverse erotic mystery "Dressed to Kill," and the violent, upsetting moral thrillers "Blow Out" and "Casualties of War"—could only bloody the waters. The joke's on them: while Cruise has succeeded in establishing a sequel-spawning action-movie franchise for himself (that is, in fulfilling the dream of every male actor in Hollywood), the real star of "Mission: Impossible" is the filmmaking. De Palma's ingenious craftsmanship is what makes this complicated gizmo tick.



Tom Cruise: A solitary avenger, operating in a world in which nothing is as it seems and no one can be trusted.

DAVID MCKEAN

Which is as it should be. The original series (created by Bruce Geller) was a kind of continuing celebration of careful planning and cool, unflappable professionalism. It was in many ways a very peculiar show: an action-adventure series that held the audience's attention with something a little less viscerally satisfying than violence and superhero bravado. Each week, a team of experts, headed by a bland, unremarkable-looking man named Jim Phelps, would be commissioned (by a disembodied voice on a self-destructing tape) to undertake some dauntingly difficult project on which the fate of the Free World, for that episode, depended. For the rest of the hour, we would watch an elaborate deception take place: an operation that typically consisted of equal parts technological trickery, theatrical disguises, and precisely timed diversions. The show, with admirable but slightly monotonous purity, never varied its formula: every episode offered viewers, in place of shoot-outs and make-my-day confrontations, the odd and rather cerebral pleasure of seeing a process unfold—of wit-



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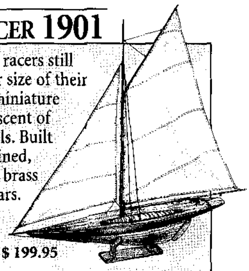

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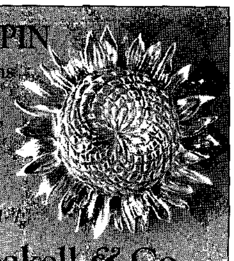

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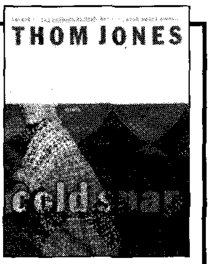

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De Palma, who has constructed several of the most fiendishly intricate sequences in movie history, is the right man for the job of bringing "Mission: Impossible" to the screen, and, having accepted the assignment, he takes the opportunity to demonstrate that big-budget action films don't have to be crude to be effective. Like the members of the Impossible Missions Force, he approaches his work as a series of incredibly complex technical problems, which can be solved only by the most rigorous application of imagination and skill: De Palma's formal virtuosity uniquely suits him to meet the challenge of "Mission: Impossible." For this material, his elegant, baroque, multilayered style is just what's needed. The "Mission: Impossible" aesthetic requires fanatical dedication to form and obsessive attention to the subtleties of technique. If this picture is to work, it has to be a magic act—a sequence of miraculous effects that depend on the performers' ability to dazzle us with apparently gratuitous gestures, to distract us with flourishes. When De Palma is at his best, his hand is quicker than even the most alert spectator's eye.

The screenwriters, David Koepp and Robert Towne, have tinkered with the classic "Mission: Impossible" formula in ways that seem intended, first, to update it for contemporary appeal—the I.M.F.'s schemes now rely heavily on computer technology—and, second, to allow it to become a star vehicle for Tom Cruise. The series, of course, was about anonymous teamwork, and was rigorously dedicated to the principle of ensemble acting. (The closest thing the show had to a star was Martin Landau, who played the team's master of disguise—which is to say that in most episodes he was all but unrecognizable.) The movie's writers manage to isolate Cruise's character, Ethan Hunt, by the simple expedient of killing off most of the rest of the team. At the beginning of the film, we're introduced to Hunt, a weary-looking Jim Phelps (Jon Voight), and Phelps's beautiful French wife, Claire (Emmanuelle Béart), and three more members of the crew (played by Kristin Scott-Thomas, Ingeborga Dapkunaite, and an unbilled Emilio Estevez); there's no sense getting too attached to this group, because it doesn't remain intact for long. The first big mission—set at an embassy reception in Prague and promising, falsely, to be one of those sleek operatives-in-evening-clothes sequences which are de rigueur for international thrillers—is a catastrophic botch that leaves Hunt as the only apparent survivor. Immediately after the bloodbath, Hunt learns that the I.M.F. was set up, and, furthermore, that he's suspected of being the traitor; he staggers back to his room and, opening up his laptop, gets down to the lonely business of uncovering the truth.

Hunt does eventually assemble another (smaller) team, but, since he's clearly operating in a world in which nothing is as it seems and no one can really be trusted, he essentially functions as a solitary avenger, zipping around the globe and prowling stealthily through cyberspace in search of justice. His adversaries include an oily C.I.A. honcho named Kittridge (Henry Czerny), an unscrupulous intelligence peddler named Max (played, with hilarious insouciance, by Vanessa Redgrave), and a mysterious figure known to Hunt only by an E-mail signature—Job. What everyone is after is a list of secret agents, but that hardly matters. The list is, in Hitchcock's famous term, a "MacGuffin"; that is, an object that the audience doesn't have to care about (or even understand) but that the characters care plenty about—enough, at least, to keep them running from one dangerous situation to another and giving us the cheap thrills we demand. In "Mission: Impossible" the MacGuffin principle is refined virtually to the point of pure abstraction. Hunt acquires the list by hacking into a closely guarded computer terminal in an all-white room at C.I.A. headquarters, in Langley, and, as if to emphasize the weightlessness of the whole enterprise, he performs this feat while suspended from the ceiling by a thin cable; if anything touches the floor—even a drop of perspiration—alarms will go off. De Palma, with no visible sweat, cranks up the physical tension of this sequence so high that you practically forget why the hero is hanging there in the first place. And, besides, this playfully brilliant scene isn't the climax of the story. It's just something that hovers—perilously, improbably—in the middle of the picture, slung between the smooth nocturnal set piece at the beginning and a blindingly speedy helicopter-and-train chase sequence at the end.

It's not surprising that De Palma treats the plot of "Mission: Impossible" as a mere pretext, a string to hang his jewelled suspense sequences from: most of his pictures seem to derive their energy from the restlessness and inventiveness of his filmmaking technique—his insatiable desire to experiment with the possibilities of visual storytelling. (It's this quality, more than any specific style or subject, that links him to Hitchcock.) Neither is it surprising that this extraordinarily original artist is capable of delivering a crowd-pleasing big-budget action picture; "The Untouchables" (1987) was proof enough of that. What makes "Mission: Impossible" seem such an enchanted mixture of popular entertainment and a director's idiosyncratic vision is that even the script's most blatant commercial strategies somehow wind up playing to De Palma's strengths. The information-age technology that so many recent movies have desperately, and ineptly, tried to exploit (think of "Johnny Mnemonic" or "The Net") is for De Palma a means of increasing the density and formal complexity of his images, and of multiplying the points of view from which events can be presented: the computer-screen and video imagery that splinters the action of "Mission: Impossible" into near-Cubist rearrangements of visual data gives him the sort of effect that for most of his career he could achieve only with split-screen technique. His unusual power as a director of thrillers and horror films has always been a function of his ability to load the frame with visual information and thus disorient the viewer with the sense that no single perspective guarantees comprehension (much less safety). His style is the movies' most potent expression of cognitive paranoia, and the up-to-date technology of "Mission: Impossible" allows him to extend the field of perceptual treachery beyond the physical world and into the almost hallucinatory realm of cyberspace.

And he makes the whole unsettling experience feel like good, mindless fun. There's a wicked glee to De Palma's work in this picture, and that infectious quality may be partly the result of the screenwriters' (or the producers') decision to turn "Mission: Impossible" into a fearless-loner-against-the-world story: since this transformation requires an act of betrayal to set it in motion—and further betrayals to keep it going—the new story strikes a chord that tends to resonate especially loudly for gifted Hollywood filmmakers. Underneath the slick, bright surface of De Palma's "Mission: Impossible," there's a current of dark humor that recalls the mordant sensibility of Sam Peckinpah's late-period thrillers "The Killer Elite" (1975) and "The Osterman Weekend" (1983)—both of which pretended to be action movies but were in fact pitch-black comedies about institutional bad faith. The pre-credit sequence of "Mission: Impossible" slyly pays homage to the unnerving opening of "Osterman," and De Palma's visual style also shows the influence of Peckinpah's imaginative use of video imagery in that picture. (The influence of "The Killer Elite" is muted somewhat by the cocky, can-do persona of Tom Cruise: he gives an impressively energetic action-hero performance, but the depth of bitterness that James Caan brought to *his* double-crossed character in Peckinpah's film seems, unfortunately, to be outside Cruise's range.) De Palma, like Peckinpah, is a filmmaker who has a reputation for scaring audiences right out of theatres and has therefore been put in the unusual position of having to live down his best work. But De Palma has a capacity for detachment that Peckinpah wholly lacked, and it has enabled him to survive the system that effectively crushed Peckinpah. As this picture exhilaratingly demonstrates, De Palma has mastered the Hollywood filmmaker's most difficult trick, the artist's ultimate illusion: he knows how to deliver the goods without surrendering his own identity. The lighthearted mood of "Mission: Impossible" is itself a kind of cunning deception. The picture's buoyancy is really a cynical joy in vindication: the relieved laughter of a man who has proved at last that professionalism is the best revenge. ♦

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Does anybody care?

BY JANE SMILEY

Now that the era of family farming is ending in the United States, only two questions remain to be answered. One is "So what?" and the other is "Who cares?" For all the elegiac books about farming that have appeared since the mid-eighties, the sentimental attachment many Americans feel for the family farm hasn't translated into any effective means of saving it. And the farm bill recently signed into law will, according to some farmers, destroy most of the smaller farms that are still managing to survive. One person who is not surprised by these events is Victor Davis Hanson. An anomaly among farm writers both for the specialty crop he and his family produce on their California farm—Thompson seedless grapes that are dried into raisins—and for his off-farm job as a professor of classics, the forty-two-year-old Hanson makes it clear in his new book, "Fields Without Dreams" (Free Press; $23), that farm life and farm values are so at odds with contemporary culture that they must and will disappear. While most critics of contemporary farming methods have preferred to address two other questions—"What happened?" and "What's next?"—with the result that their lament for what is being lost is muted by practical concerns, Hanson's memoir, informed by almost three thousand years of Western history, is passionate, confrontational, and bracingly apocalyptic. As the era of the family farm ends, perhaps it is true that a certain strain of rural literature, where life and death are at issue and dramas are hardly mitigated by culture, is also ending. If so, then "Fields Without Dreams" is a fitting valedictory work.

In "The Other Greeks," his 1995 treatise on the relationship between middle-class democratic values and the rise of small, diversified farms in preclassical Greece, Hanson argued that the forms of government that Americans accept as ideal—what we think of as a democratic and civil society—arose naturally out of a Greek economy based on farms of limited size that were cultivated and defended by their owners. The farms bred in their owners many reluctances—reluctance to go to town, reluctance to submit to the authority of others, reluctance to wage any but a defensive war, reluctance to die in battle (hence the heavy, almost immobilizing weapons and armor that made their battles nearly ritualistic), reluctance to innovate or to accept passing fashions of any kind. These reluctances, in turn, made for a stable social and political system that accorded the owner of property of a middling size a great deal of autonomy, and later served as the model for the American Jeffersonian democratic ideal. In "The Other Greeks" Hanson wrote like the most careful of farmers. His argument was exhaustively documented and developed, beautifully reasoned, clearly—and, for the most part, calmly—stated.

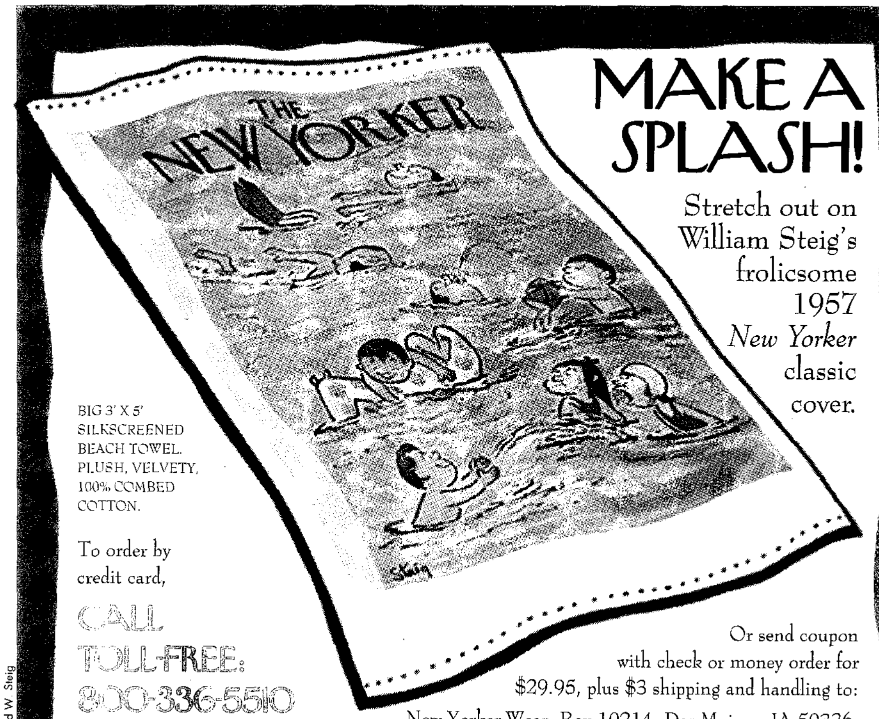
What is in danger, according to Victor Davis Hanson, is the nation's identity. Photograph by Eva Leitolf.

In "Fields Without Dreams," Hanson's meditation upon the past fifteen years on his family's California grape farm, he writes like a Greek, with hubris, pursuit by Furies, fate, and tragic irony present in full measure. Hanson is open about his literary model—not Virgil, of the "Georgics," comfortable and noble, but Hesiod, of "Works and Days," which he calls "a more melancholy, more angry account of the necessary pain and sacrifice needed to survive on the land." Like Hesiod, Hanson, though he teaches Latin and Greek at a nearby university, in no way wants to leave the farm, not only hates but disdains leaving the farm. His memoir is shadowed by an image he invokes in the first chapter: "Finally last year I built a stone-block wall all around the house and yard, a 550-foot circuit, 6 feet tall, 3,000 feet of steel rebar, 50 cubic yards of concrete foundation, more a fortress really than a mere enclosure." There is a hint of madness in this wall, but Hanson leaves it unclear whether the madness lies without or within.

The fall of the house of Hanson (though not certain as of this writing, since Hanson and his family still live on the farm, grow the grapes, and dry them into raisins, even though the farm no longer supports itself) began with the raisin crash of 1983. In 1982, the Hansons received thirteen hundred dollars a ton for their raisins—enough to support Hanson, his two brothers, a cousin, and their families, and enough to plan a few repairs and improvements. The land had been in the family for a hundred-odd years, the infrastructure had been built long since, and the family even had another paid-for farm, which was being rented out. But in 1983 the vagaries of government policy (allowing cheap grapes into the country), overproduction, and consumer taste meant that the price of raisins dropped to four hundred and fifty dollars a ton: not enough to pay the cost of production, much less to repay the family labor.

Hanson writes, "In our family the response was concerted and immediate. We mortgaged out another $100,000 from the land. My mother and father in their sixties pledged over their entire salary to make up the other lost $50,000; neither thought of selling—had they, no one would have bought. We cut our living expenses. A $720-a-month draw for a sixty-hour week was what I settled on for my family (soon to be five)—and that was too high." The family had faith, at first, that a good year would save them. A precedent for such a salvation had been established during the Depression, when Hanson's grandfather found a lucrative market among the hotels of San Francisco for his exotic white nectarines.

In retrospect, according to Hanson, what the family should have done after 1983 was to sit tight, work in town, and wait for the raisin and grape markets to change. Instead, being young and energetic, Hanson's generation borrowed money and brought the other family farm into production, planting on it a new, early-bearing variety of plums and a new, long-storing variety of red table grapes. In this section of Hanson's memoir, tragic ironies abound, and I will resist telling his story for him, except to list the chemicals that the theretofore essentially chemical-free grape growers now found themselves handling: fifteen applications of sulfur, four of a "systemic" mildew killer called Bayleton, three applications of fungicide (all carcinogenic), copper dust, more fungicide (this in a powdered form), desiccating lime (as in plaster), cryolite powder, miticide, two sprays of an organophosphate (since



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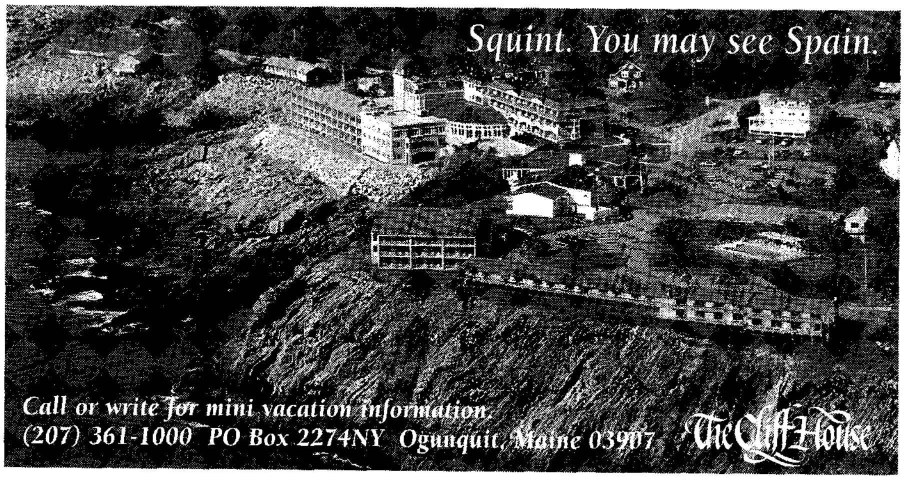

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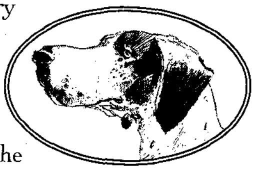


IN BOOKSTORES NOW FROM VIKING

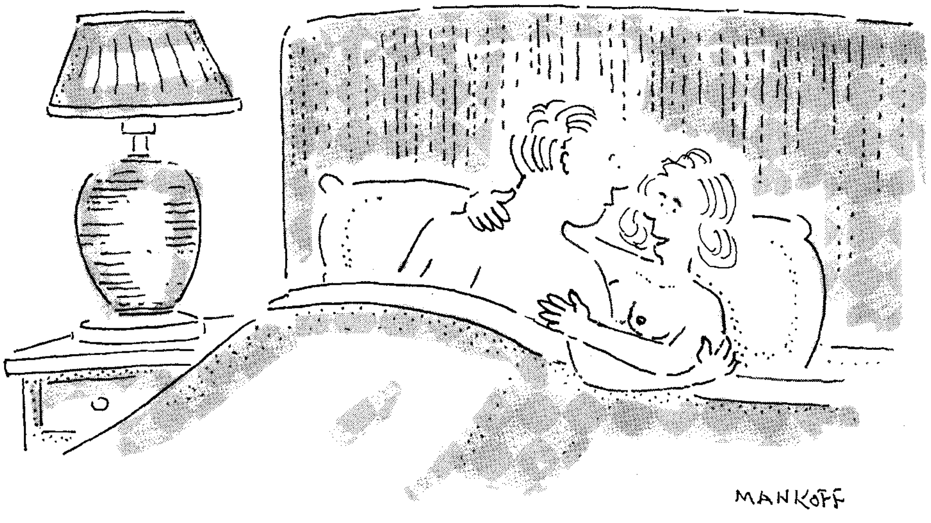
banned), and then Sevin, the same chemical whose manufacture poisoned thousands as a result of an industrial accident in Bhopal, India, in 1984. For weeds, there was paraquat: "The manufacturer wisely added a horrible smell and a vile dark color to the brew to ward off either animals or children. Black Death we called it." Once the grapes got into cold storage, intended for "the holiday table" (yours and mine), the storage facility continued dosing them with more applications of fungicide. That year, Hanson came down with a "mysterious case of unending mononucleosis." The new farm that was meant to save the old farm now became a burden, both economic and spiritual.

MORE than anything, Hanson wants to be a real farmer: a man who makes his living and supports his family entirely through farming. A real farmer views Hesiod's "bribe-swallowers"—essentially, all non-farmers—with extreme suspicion. He speaks his mind, no matter how unacceptable his views. He is by nature conservative; advises, "Don't move, don't divorce, don't change jobs"; has his children working hard by his side, making sure they avoid the temptations of town. A farmer is a man. Hanson writes, "Feminist historians, I imagine, argue that women have kept the American farm alive and have not received their due; behind every man with a hoe, they say, was a woman nursing, washing, and counseling. With great reluctance and some trepidation, I confess that this more sober, more balanced, less epic picture of agrarianism is true." The Hanson women—most notably, Victor Davis Hanson's mother, Catherine—rescued the farm more than once. But, even so, the high drama of farming, for Hanson, is played out among men. A farmer is not charmed by uncultivated landscape. Hanson has no kind words for the San Joaquin Valley as it was a hundred and fifty years ago, pre-farming, and no interest in the nearby Sierra Nevada Mountains, except as an example of a bad place for an orchard; he even manages to get a little exercised over the rattlesnakes "sipping the scarce water as it oozed out the hose" in an unprofitable mountain orchard planted there by another farmer. What truly inspires a real farmer's admiration is a field that has been laser-levelled, a "two-inch fall every half mile." And a farmer is most assuredly not a gardener—not one of "these backyard suburban know-it-alls, these New Age gardeners utterly ignorant of the concept of scale." A real farmer is a man who wants above all to farm, even if his every farming effort is carrying him closer to having to sell the place for debt. After the failure of the fancy plums and the exotic table grapes, Hanson can still recall the year he and his family planted them with joy:

> Like the epic images on the shield of Achilles, we were laborers engaged in group struggle, the finest moments of our lives, a family harmony that even the jaded stopped their trucks to gape at. . . . Over a decade later, all subsequent labor is mere fluff; in comparison to creating trees and vines, our later toils are mere wasted hours of brag or whine.

Hanson does not assert that real farmers are necessarily kinder, better, or wiser than the rest of us, even in pursuing their own interests. He notes the tendency of farmers to vote Republican even when anti-inflationary, big-business policies of Republican administrations impoverish farmers, for farmers tend to do better when land has more value and cash has less. He also notes the practices of "hard-nosed" neighbors of his, who stole his irrigation water, cheated labor contractors, betrayed their own relatives, or made sure that the Hansons knew they were lying in wait for his family to go broke and sell up, so they could buy the Hanson land. There is a crucial difference between a real farmer and a good farmer, though, and it is a difference that goads Hanson and broods over the text: a real farmer farms, but a good farmer farms successfully enough so that, no matter what, he doesn't lose the farm.

WITH the end of family farming, and the disappearance of a population of real farmers, what is in danger, according to Hanson, is the nation's identity. His concerns are in part personal ones. At the very beginning, he invokes the figure of his grandfather Rhys Burton, a real farmer, who farmed the same piece of land through the Depression, through the Second World War, and through many hardships, and who died at eighty-six: "He paid in cash, rarely by check, and handed the money to his seller face-to-face; he never drank, never smoked, ate sparingly, traveled little, married the first woman he courted, and knew no other for the next sixty-seven years." Rhys Burton supported many relatives off and on over the years, sent his children to college, and died solvent, having preserved and improved the farm he'd inherited. He also voted in his own interest—for Democratic inflation rather than Republican deflation. The likelihood that the present generation will not live up to such a beloved model is simply torture to Hanson—evidence of weakness, failure, foolishness, moral decline. The central issue is losing the farm: if that can be avoided, then perhaps the other elements of the model can be fudged, but if the farm is lost that is overt evidence of every other failure. Hanson makes no excuses. Any feeling on the part of the reader that the family was perhaps unwise in one choice or another is amply preëmpted by Hanson's own superego, which is a relentless scourge. Hanson extrapolates from his agony to the situation of the



"Wow, our first date, and already I feel like it's our second."

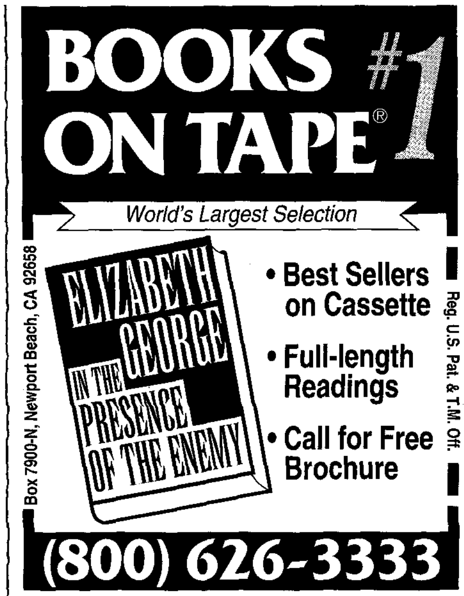
multitude of other farmers who lost their land in the last fifteen years, and his memoir is a pretty good record of those farmers' pain, which has largely gone unrecorded. Reports of farmer suicides, murders in farm country, divorces, and other manifestations of grief and rage did make it into the media and the movies from time to time in the mid-eighties, but farmers are by and large private and stoical. Some farmer-writers, such as Gene Logsdon, whose analysis of the ills of modern farming is generally right on the mark, reject outright any discussion of farm life whose tone doesn't accentuate the positive. Hanson's memoir is one of the few documents recording how bad it feels to fail.

In addition, Hanson knows what he is talking about when he analyzes the economic forces that have made family farming a losing proposition, and he is not shy in stating them. A main culprit is the United States Department of Agriculture, which talks about trying to save the family farm while funnelling money to everyone in agriculture except the family farmer. Hanson writes, "It is an iron law of American politics that corporate agriculturalists give to politicians and in return enjoy federal protection regardless of party, ideology, or purported creed"—an observation borne out in almost every element of the recent farm bill, and most particularly in the provision that ties the size of subsidies to the level of past production, thereby rewarding corporate farming and penalizing small farmers. He suggests *really* doing what American economists often prescribe for Russia, which is to stop all subsidies immediately and let the market arbitrate the outcome. "The result to family farms could not be worse than the events of the last half century," he writes. "Peripheral benefits might accrue once the subsidy-giving umbilical cord has been cut: the American consumer might pay for the real cost of producing food; farm land might be banked and for a time go out of production; the despised yeoman might win real respect, not sympathy and misguided romanticism, as he beat back the top-heavy corporation."

Also to blame are the food-processing corporations, all the packagers and shippers and sellers of food, who, according to Hanson, charge both the consumer and the farmer, and rake off huge profits for, in some cases, doing almost nothing to the product—many fruits and vegetables, for example, are packed on the farm and thereafter untouched by anyone until they reach the shelves of the supermarket. The natural consequence of the profitability of processing compared to the losses in growing is the vertical monopolization of farmland: the produce is grown on land owned by the processing corporation; then the crop grown at a loss can be processed at a profit. Farmland goes away from the farmer, who cannot afford such losses, and into the corporate estate faster and faster. Hanson proposes forbidding the growth of raw product by processing corporations, just as other monopolies are controlled by government regulation. And he proposes regulating water rights: a particular wrinkle of California farming that exacerbates the transfer of land away from farmers is the subsidy of irrigation water. Landowning corporations receive subsidized water and then, according to Hanson, sell it at a profit to urban dwellers, mostly in Los Angeles. If the family farm is to be saved, higher tariffs for irrigation water should be charged to the large parcels of land under absentee ownership. Agriculture, said to be prospering (one farmer feeding more than a hundred Americans, etc.), is actually staggering under many varieties of cost shifting which enable landholding and food-processing corporations to flourish at the expense of the farmer, the taxpayer, the soil, and the water supply.

But Hanson's real focus is our culture, not our economy. Farmers, he maintains, are skeptical, and thus are a conservative drag upon the forces of chaos. At the most basic level, many people with a stake in working their own land are more inclined to think in the long term and act responsibly and less inclined to dissipate their substance in frivolous fads and expenditures. Hanson looks out from behind his stone-block wall and sees the rootless, cruel, and dangerous of every social class swarming ever closer: wrecking their cars in vineyards, building mansions and planting lawns on irreplaceable farmland, committing murders and robberies, manifesting every evil consequence of having nothing worthwhile to do. His vision is a compelling one, but he considers himself a Cassandra, who is here to reveal our doom but is without hope that we can avoid it.

It's tempting to argue with Hanson,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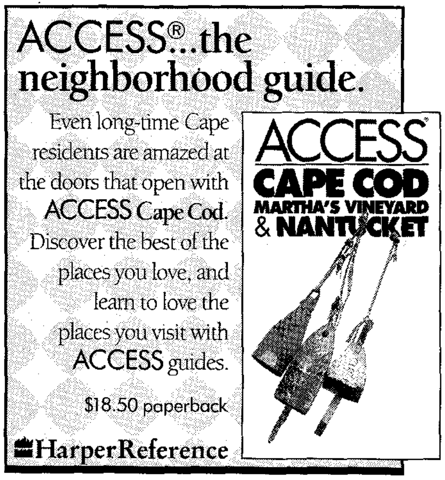
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since his style is eagerly argumentative—he is intolerant, and aggressive about it, too. He is disdainful of every form of employment other than farming, even as he perceives disdain for farming in the careless indifference to farming of everyone he meets. He hates academics the most ("Bus knew that the majority in the university can be bought off for ten cents on the dollar"). No, he hates La Raza activists the most ("subsidized pigmentists who once grandly called for a Hispanic Nation"). No, he hates the board of the local raisin co-op the most ("Plato's timocratic men in the flesh, rapacious for more honors and more land"), or Larry Black, the hired executive who impoverished the co-op growers, or the San Francisco lawyer who handled the suit of the growers against the co-op ("a brainless puppet"). Hanson lives in a world of scoundrels, fools, and heroes, and maybe most of all he hates social scientists, for the language they bring to soften and muddy the vivid moral colors of that world.

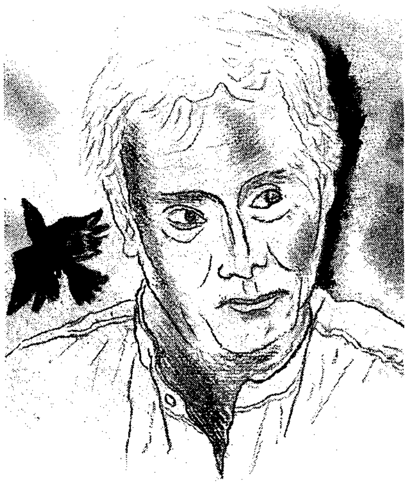
Victor Davis Hanson might not care to have me say this, but he's a writer as much as a farmer. His memoir is complex—passionate, angry, honest, scorching, but also, sometimes, whiny and bitter, and there's nothing wrong with that. The book deserves a wide audience. His tale is suspenseful even though the outcome, as in a tragedy, is a foregone conclusion. He's a good storyteller and a complex man, and his Greek-inspired rhetoric is a bracing departure from the agronomy-speak that has eviscerated discussion of these issues. For the sake of farming in America, even with the passage of the new farm bill, perhaps the "So what?" and the "Who cares?" questions will prove more compelling to the average reader than the "What happened?" and "What's next?" have done. Hanson thinks not, but I don't know. Maybe. ♦

HAUNTED

Poems of paradise and its ghosts.

BY J. D. McCLATCHY

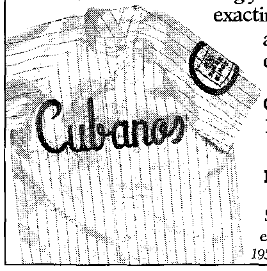
SOUTHWESTERN France has a worn-down ruggedness. In the squares of its small towns, old men play boules and sip pastis. The countryside is fissured limestone and rusted signposts, groves of gnarled plum and walnut trees, the tonkle of sheep bells, hay wagons, slate roofs, boar and wren and eglantine. In 1954, with the help of an eight-hundred-dollar legacy from an old schoolteacher aunt, W. S. Merwin bought a stone farmhouse in the Quercy. In his latest book of poems, "The Vixen" (Knopf; $21)—the fifteenth of his career—he returns to both this landscape and his memories of it. To the extent that it evokes a place and a time that has meant much to him, the book is suffused with details of country life—solitary walks and garden work, woodsmoke, birdsong, lightfall. To the extent that it is about memory itself, the book turns that place into a myth—a lost paradise, like Alain-Fournier's demesne.



W. S. Merwin

PHILIPPE CARON

This is not another of those now popular books about a bemused outsider's sojourn in rural France, brimming with colorful locals and heartwarming anecdotes. There are people in "The Vixen"—historical characters of the region, a couple of aged neighbors named Esther and Edouard, Richard the mason, a "you," an "us"—but there are more ghosts. The book begins with one—a fox in the shape of an old man—and ghosts abound throughout. Merwin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himself is a spectral presence, walking back through the vanished landscape of his past. The way we remember is, of course, the way we also forget, and this poet is keenly aware of how the past eludes us, of how much we discard, the better to cherish whatever we sense may still feed our desires. His evocations are at once a homage to the past and a defense against both the chaos of the passing moment and the blankness of the future. And at the heart of his book is a persistent ache: "Did I think it would abide as it was forever/all that time ago the turned earth in the old garden/where I stood in spring remembering spring in another place/that had ceased to exist."

One has to lean forward to hear these quiet poems. They sound much like Stravinsky's description of the sound of a guitar: not small but as if from far away. And because Merwin forgoes standard punctuation, one sometimes strains to follow him, reading a phrase both forward and backward to track its fluctuating syntactical status. The poems are not vessels to contain meaning but nets to catch new meanings as they drift through the lines on successive readings. Settled loosely on the page as on a microscope slide, each poem is a sort of solution in which ideas float, detach, combine.

Over the years, Merwin has put forward all sorts of parables—of emptiness and exploitation, awe and ardor. And they have helped define two stages in his career: years of the vision and years of the dream. The poems of his middle years, which brought him fame—the poems in "The Lice" (1967) and "The Carrier of Ladders" (1970)—remain among the most extraordinary of the age. Haunted by the war in Vietnam and by capitalism's greedy assault on the environment, they have a post-apocalyptic tone, uncanny and disquieting. There are some poets—Shakespeare, Keats, Browning, Stevens—whom we admire for their transcendent art as it plays over all the embossed surfaces of human life. But there are others—Blake, Wordsworth, Whitman, Dickinson—who we feel were granted a vision, access to the other side of experience. It is impossible to read "The Lice" and not feel that Merwin is one of this visionary company.

His most recent books, no less powerfully, pursue a dream and seem thereby more richly plangent. They are as deeply concerned with ancestors and animals, trees and tribes as his earlier books are, but in a different register. A poem in "The Vixen" called "White Morning" epitomizes this tone. It is a misty morning, the poet is on a walk:

> the crows were calling around me to white air
> I could hear their wings dripping and hear small birds with lights
> breaking in their tongues the cold soaked through me I was able
> after that morning to believe stories that once
> would have been closed to me I saw a carriage go under
> the oaks there in full day and vanish I watched animals there
> I sat with friends in the shade they have all disappeared
> most of the stories have to do with vanishing

How easily he maneuvers here between the present and the past, each a passage into the other. His incantatory voice enlarges the incident, and his placement of details—crow or carriage—edges them toward a mysterious symbolism. Memory itself becomes a familiar but evanescent story.

Merwin has always been a contemplative poet, drawn to the lessons of the natural world and the rigors of the unmediated vision. He has also been—and this is uncommon in our raw, ironic century—a romantic poet, heroic in his quest for the depths and intensities, the powers and possibilities of consciousness. Best of all, he has been a surprising poet, continually slipping the bonds of anyone's easy admiration. Merwin's imitators, for whom he is an icon of instinct and experimentation, are deaf to the bracing intelligence and deep love of tradition that guide his imagination. Readers who want to claim him for the surrealist camp seem blind to the fact that he doesn't just string things along, has no interest in the banal or outré, and has always cared about the *shape* of a poem, which is to say that his poems have a moral purpose at their heart. All along, his originality—and he writes with one of the most distinctive and original voices in American poetry—has had to do with origins. "True originality," he once said, "has to do not with trying to be new but trying to come from the place from which all renewal comes." In his case, that has been his vision of horrors and blessings, his dream of a lost upland. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

A Fine Balance, by Rohinton Mistry (Knopf; $26). Indira Gandhi's state of emergency creates personal emergencies for almost everyone in India, whether it is the aristocratic and beautiful Dina, who has infuriated her family by marrying beneath her station; the kindly Ishvar, who is yoked to his worrisomely rebellious nephew; or the privileged student Maneck. It is impossible not to seethe at the injustices of the police state, and impossible not to take these characters passionately to heart: this is a novel that can stand with the best of Dickens.

My Home Is Far Away, by Dawn Powell (Steerforth; $14). Best known for her brilliant New York satires, Dawn Powell—like her protagonist here, Marcia Willard—was the second of three sisters who, after their mother's death from consumption, were virtually abandoned by their feckless father. Set amid the railroad yards and rooming houses of the Midwest at the turn of the century, this extraordinary, nominally fictionalized autobiography (first published in 1944) quietly documents the humiliations of a radically impoverished childhood.

California Fault, by Thurston Clarke (Ballantine; $24). The size of the Golden State tends to overwhelm its chroniclers, but Thurston Clarke devised a journey along the San Andreas Fault, which slashes diagonally from California's northern coast to its southern desert, and then let his seismic itinerary lead him through the stressed and fractured social landscape of the nineties. The author has an unerring ability to search out exactly the right despoiler, utopian, or local eccentric to illuminate the history and character of each stop along the way. The result is a vivid and continually surprising narrative.

The Bürgermeister's Daughter, by Steven Ozment (St. Martin's; $23.95). Anna Büschler chose the wrong time, and the wrong town, in which to conduct affairs with two men simultaneously. In the fifteen-twenties the German city of Hall was in the thick of the Reformation, and its inhabitants had scant tolerance for sexual liberty, particularly for a daughter of one of the town's leading citizens. Her enraged father once kept her chained to an oak table for six months, and in his will he did everything he could to reduce her to poverty. The litigious Anna fought endless battles to regain her alienated fortune, leaving behind a legal trail that has enabled Ozment to reconstruct sixteenth-century German society in rare detail—a task he carries out with even rarer grace.

The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, 1899-1936, edited by Barbara Reynolds (St. Martin's; $26.95). This superbly readable, meticulously edited selection takes Sayers from a rural childhood as the daughter of a country parson to worldwide fame as the creator of that highborn detective Lord Peter Wimsey. Sayers's life epitomized the social upheavals following the First World War, which radically altered the position of middle-class women, and her letters show her struggling to find her way in work and in love, and surviving rejection in both areas. Her acute observations, her sense of humor, and her occasional fits of fierceness make these letters as compelling as anything she published.

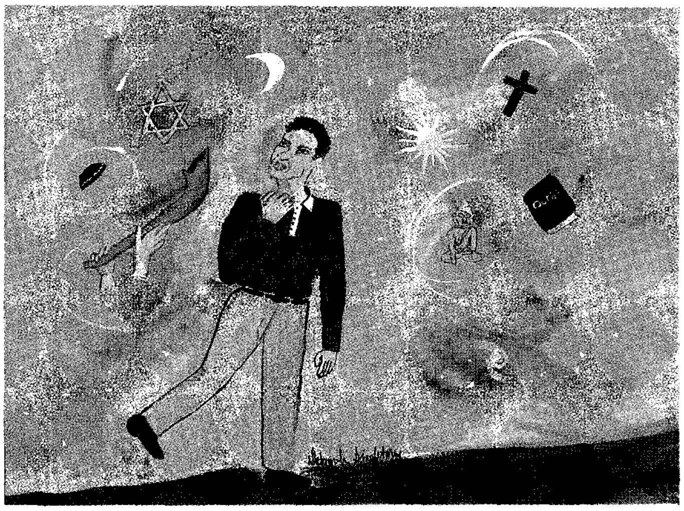
SHOUTS & MURMURS

GOD, HELP ME!

BY RICH COHEN

The recent surge in American spirituality has sent even the most secular adults into what has become a religion bazaar, where the boundaries are far more fluid and the rules less rigid than when they were children.—*The Times Magazine.*

I WAS raised a Hebrew, and for a long time I was happy to have that religion. Being a Hebrew meant good ethnic food, doting grandmothers, stern fathers, sensible lectures, stories and more stories, and thousands of international bankers just waiting to bankroll any harebrained scheme I might come up with. And it wasn't just the bankers: in the beginning, the Hebrew God Himself was just as giving. I prayed to Him, and He smote mine enemies. When I was a boy, cut in the fashion of a young David, I was troubled by a bully who lived on a farm near my father's summer cottage. One day, after taking a beating, I appealed to the Hebrew God, and He responded, salting the fields of that farm. Later, someone told me, the sky above the farmhouse was filled with locusts, and that's when I knew the Hebrew God was the best God of all.



DEBORAH SINGLETARY

As I got older, though, I noticed signs of strain in my relationship with the Hebrew God. I did all the things I used to do—the lamb killing, the horn blowing—only now, to my adolescent self, these things seemed silly. The Hebrew God and I were growing apart. It was no one's fault. And rather than let bad feelings build up between us, I decided to make a clean break while the memories were still good.

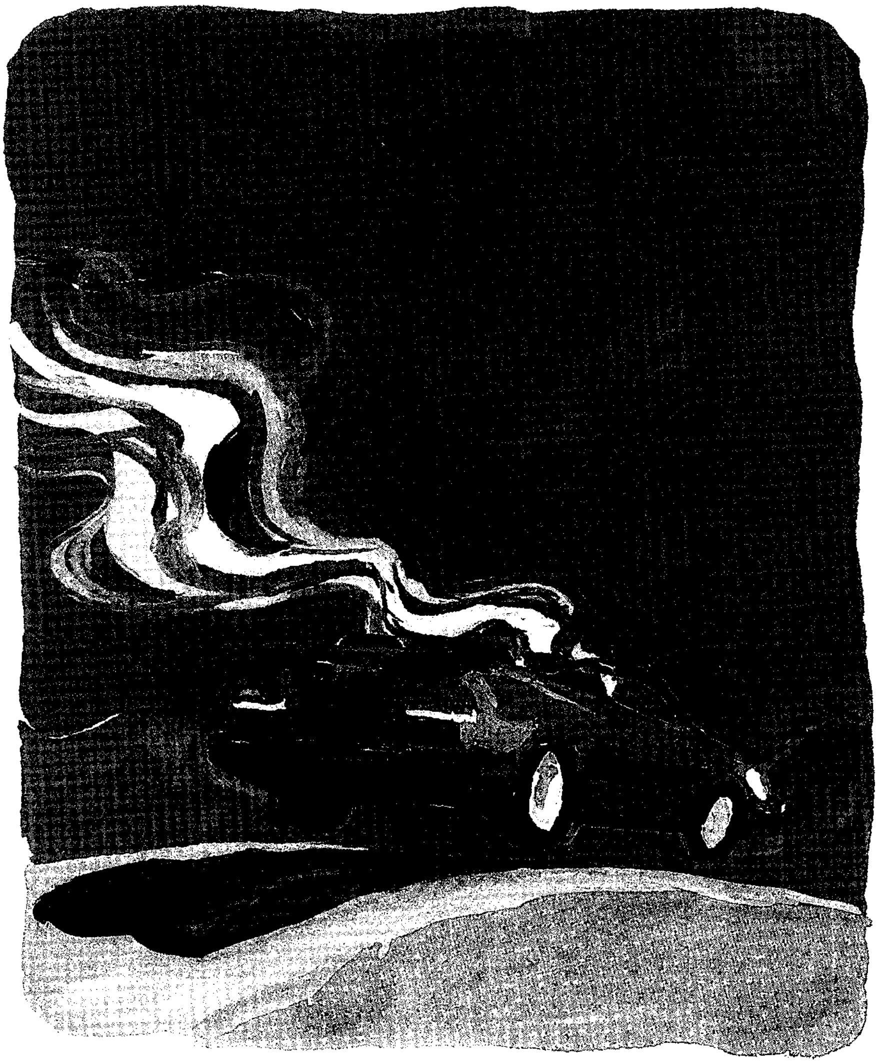
I said my goodbyes in a temple on the shore of Lake Michigan, dropped my yarmulke in the yarmulke box, slid the gold star from around my neck, and went off into the world alone. Sometime later, I heard that the Hebrew God was mad at me—that He made people close to me curse my name, that inanimate objects became animate, that dogs filled the sky like birds.

But I was determined to move on and make the most of my freedom, so I turned to paganism. I became a keen observer of the seasons, enjoyed the occasional boar's head, celebrated the vernal equinox, and worshipped idols where idols could be found. Still searching, I stumbled into the arms of Islam. At first, Allah treated me well, spreading my seed like the stars in the sky: I couldn't turn around without getting lucky. Later, after I'd had my fill and the thrill began to wear off, the Muslim God turned demanding: read this, contemplate that, don't eat this, pray in that direction, wait till the sun goes down, wait till the sun comes up, yada-yada-yada. So, again, off I went.

I dabbled in the religions of the East. I saw the Buddha both clothed and naked. (May I suggest you see him clothed.) I tried my hand at various Christian sects. I traced the footsteps of the Apostles. I ate ham. I went to see a Pentecostal minister, who made me speak in tongues. Frustrated, and feeling tongue-tied, I called a shaman, who laid me down, fed me garlic, and said, "Be silent, and come out of him!" Dozens of unclean spirits rose from my body, like smoke from a house on fire. After the shaman left the room, one of the spirits stayed behind to thank me for his freedom. As a show of friendship, he then asked for the name of an enemy and promised to make that man's tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth. The last I saw of this enemy, he had assumed the shape of a goat, and his pathetic bleating was music to my ears.

And yet, despite all this good fortune, I am haunted by memories—things the Hebrew God and I had done together, warm, pleasant afternoons. I am no more satisfied than the day I discarded my Seder plate. A few days ago, as I was moping around my apartment after some past-life therapy, my neighbor Doug came over and said, "I am worshipping the Hebrew God. I just thought you should know." The next morning, I saw Doug at the mall, wearing a tallis and tefillin. What an ass kisser! I walk up to him, and the first thing he says to me is that he's won the Pick Four. Then I tell him I'm thirsty and want a drink, and he hands me a rock. "Oh, I forgot," he says, smirking. "He doesn't do that for you anymore, does He?"

Now I find myself wondering why I left the Hebrew God in the first place. How could I have been such a fool? But my therapist tells me I'm remembering only the good things. "What about the bad stuff?" she says. "What about His temper?" It's true. Who wants to be covered from head to toe with boils? Besides, I know that the Hebrew God is a stickler for etiquette, and Doug is bound to screw up. When he ends up blind and wandering through some desert, I'll be sitting at home, with a thirty-inch TV, a beer, and my healing crystals. ♦



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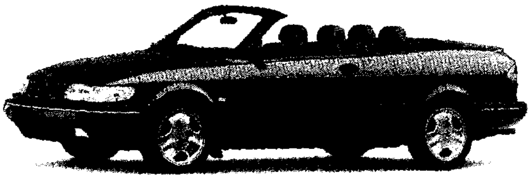

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